

BREWINGTON, PAULETTE YVONNE, Ph.D. Wild, Willful, and Wicked: African American Childhood and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (1850s-1900). (2013)

Directed by Dr. Karen A. Weyler. 249 pp.

This dissertation examines nineteenth-century depictions of African American children in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857), and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859). It explores Stowe's characters as wild, willful, and unruly minstrel-inspired comic figures further exaggerated with nineteenth-century stereotypes such as: shiftlessness, ignorance heathenism, and demonism. Both novels of Webb and Wilson serve as respondents to Stowe's creations. Frank J. Webb presents industrious, educated children whose pranks are born out of self-possession. Wilson, on the other hand, illustrates that for the African American child in servitude in the free North, hardship and violence can rival that of the slave-holding South.

WILD, WILLFUL, AND WICKED: AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDHOOD  
AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERARY IMAGINATION  
(1850S-1900)

by

Paulette Yvonne Brewington

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro  
2013

Approved by

---

Committee Chair

© 2013 Paulette Yvonne Brewington

## APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

---

Committee Members

---

---

---

---

Date of Acceptance by Committee

---

Date of Final Oral Examination

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| LIST OF FIGURES .....   | v    |
| <br>CHAPTER   |      |
| I. INTRODUCTION .....   | 1    |
| II. <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> .....  | 19   |
| Introduction .....  | 19   |
| Harry Harris: Stowe's "Pig in a Poke" .....   | 26   |
| Mose and Pete: Come Ye Sinners .....  | 39   |
| Aint' Misbehavin' .....   | 52   |
| Topsy: <i>Something</i> Wicked .....  | 71   |
| Conclusion .....  | 106  |
| III. CHARLIE AND KINCH: FREEDOM AND CHILDHOOD IN<br><i>THE GARIES AND THEIR FRIENDS</i> ..... | 110  |
| Introduction. ....  | 110  |
| Publication Background .....  | 111  |
| Structural Background .....   | 113  |
| Caricature Dismissed .....  | 115  |
| Charlie by Other Names .....  | 124  |
| "Train Up a Child" .....  | 128  |
| "As Bad as I Can Be." .....   | 131  |
| Servitude Revisited at Warmouth .....   | 141  |
| "A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste." .....  | 145  |
| Minstrel Redux.....   | 154  |
| Conclusion .....  | 157  |
| IV. SERVITUDE'S CRUELITIES IN HARRIET WILSON'S <i>OUR NIG</i> .....                           | 162  |
| Introduction and Background .....   | 162  |
| Abandonment .....   | 166  |
| Frado's Adoption Narrative .....  | 169  |
| "I's Mighty Wicked." ( <i>UTC</i> 213) .....  | 176  |
| The Mule of the World .....   | 181  |
| A Monstrous Mistress .....  | 185  |
| "This Little Light of Mine": Childhood .....  | 189  |
| The "Closet of the Soul" (Walker 78) .....  | 194  |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Conversion .....                            | 202 |
| Seduction? .....                            | 204 |
| Conclusion: Liberation and Redemption ..... | 207 |
| V. CONCLUSION .....                         | 210 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....                          | 213 |
| APPENDIX A. LIST OF FIGURES .....           | 231 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| Figure 1. “Eliza comes to tell Uncle Tom that he is sold and<br>that she is running away to save her child.” ..... | 231  |
| Figure 2. “Valuing the Human Article.” .....   | 232  |
| Figure 3. “George and Eliza.” .....  | 233  |
| Figure 4. An Untitled Illustration of Chloe, Uncle Tom,<br>Mose, Pete, Polly, and George Shelby .....              | 234  |
| Figure 5. “Mose and Pete with the Baby.” .....   | 235  |
| Figure 6. “Young Niggers on the Verandah.” .....   | 236  |
| Figure 7. “Haley and Nigger Boys.” .....   | 237  |
| Figure 8. “Topsy’s Mischief.” .....  | 238  |
| Figure 9. “Eva and Topsy.” .....   | 239  |
| Figure 10. “Coon Dat Carried De Razor.” .....  | 240  |
| Figure 11. “Daniel Lambert” .....  | 241  |
| Figure 12. “Miss Dinah Crow” .....   | 242  |

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines representations of nineteenth-century African American children and childhood in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857) and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) as responses to depictions in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Stowe's characterizations of black children, rich in valences of black-faced minstrelsy, appear as "wild and uncontrollable pickaninnies" (Haywood 419) with wooly heads, beady eyes, and glistening teeth set against jet-black complexions. Black-faced minstrelsy's popularity heightened in the U. S. during the 1830s with Thomas D. Rice and continued through the 1840s with minstrel companies. Eric Lott claims: "For a time in the late 1840s minstrelsy came to be seen as the most representative national art" (8). Stowe's representations of black children emulated minstrelsy's "principal cultural forms: dance, music, and verbal play" (Lott 101). The children dance, sing, perform antics, and speak in heavy dialect associated with the minstrel stage. They thrive in Stowe's mythic, antebellum world of patriarchal benevolence – a world absent of laboring slaves and abuse. Her depictions of children, however, erode along a slope of blissful ignorance into the iconic character of Topsy, a loathsome, heathenish creature "incapable of intellectual or spiritual action" (419), and



significantly, one insensible to physical cruelty. Such depiction promotes the enslaved black child as an ignorant, wicked, Other who, by virtue of his or her difference, while sanctioning and encouraging abuse. *The Garies* and *Our Nig* reject such ideology through irony and satire.

As the term “child” is implicit in childhood, my research begins, in part, by way of historical inquiry into nineteenth-century perceptions of the black child. Overall, childhood was considered the stage of human growth and development between infancy and adulthood. For this project, I follow Wilma King’s delineations from the 1850 Census of the United States where children ages five to twenty-one years were categorized under the heading of “Youth” (King xx). The age distinction has particular relevance with Stowe’s characters, Sam and Andy, who are little more than teenagers (Yarbrough 47), mask subterfuge with childlike Sambo antics.

The “Sambo” character was a creation of Southern lore (Elkins 82). This character was a “typical adult slave whose relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment” (82). Dismissing the Sambo characterization as myth, historian Melville J. Herskovits explains such beliefs were fueled by notions that in African Americans, childlike behavior occurred “naturally” with easy adjustments “to the most unsatisfactory social situations, which they accept readily and even happily” (1). According to this definition, the owning class considered mature, even aged, adult slaves as children. The minstrel stage captured this racial subordination by presenting the adult

slave as a child in “loyal deference to his loving parent” (Toll 75). Literary critics have associated these perceptions with Stowe’s character, Uncle Tom. But Elkins concludes that in reality “this [alleged] childlike quality was the very key to [the slave’s] being” (Elkins 82). For slaves, exhibiting behavior expected by the owning class was a survival strategy that worked to their own advantage.

From cultural and biological perspectives, my research recognizes the child as a “social and political entity,” the site of “a series of representational possibilities ... a cultural construct that encodes the complex, ever shifting logic of the social worlds that produce it” (Levander 16). Early nineteenth-century plantation literature, for instance, presented enslaved black children in terms of their Otherness. John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn* (1825) captures black child imagery in gothic metaphor; slave children are “goblins,” “Old Nick’s own brood,” and “imps” (118, 265, 309). Each of Kennedy’s “strange blending of metaphors ... insists on inhumanity and grotesqueness and hints at danger” (Yellin 56). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* resumes this strategy in characterizations of black children but substitutes comedy for danger. Nineteenth-century New Orleans physician Samuel Cartwright attributed slaves’ pranks and tricksterisms to biological defects. He concluded that they “are apt to do much mischief, which appears as if intentional, but is mostly owing to the stupidity of the mind insensibility of the nerves induced by [disease]” (333). Slave owners described such mischief as “rascality.”

Each of the novels in this dissertation explores representational possibilities of the child and the representational possibilities of the child’s experiences (childhood).

Between 1850 and 1890, “[c]lose to 50 percent of both whites and African-Americans were children” (qtd. in Clement 1), but there was no common experience of childhood among these children. Factors such as disparities in social class, race, gender, and geography created many childhood experiences (Clement 1). For the black children discussed in this project, additional factors such as slavery in the South as well as hired service and indentured service in the North influenced childhood.

Slave narratives indicate that enslaved black children experienced some form of childhood even though “they entered the work place early and were more readily subjected to arbitrary plantation authority, punishments, and separations” (King xx). Harriet Jacobs, for example, recalls six years of a happy childhood while living with her grandmother. Frederick Douglass attributes having a childhood or “leisure time” to his young age. He was not old enough to work in the field (Douglass, *Narrative* 38). According to the Douglass model, leisure time during childhood was in direct proportion with age and labor readiness. Plantation records and slave narratives support Douglass’s claim, indicating that “no slave child did any work before the age of ten.” Very young children, then, would have had more leisure time and opportunity for play, but plantation records also indicate that some masters worked children “unmercifully from the time they could toddle” (Genovese 502). While these records support the existence of a truncated childhood, they also confirm Wilma King’s assertion that slavery hijacked the enslaved child’s youthful days. Indeed, there was no common experience of childhood.

Play often reflected survival skills. Leisure time was an opportunity to improvise play toys and games – to engage in role play (King, *Stolen Childhood* 45, 48-49). Role play would have demonstrated that slave children understood their social positions in the plantation hierarchy. Antics and performance, then, could have thwarted a severe beating or more importantly, secured favor with the slave holder. And yet these same forms of play in addition to tricks and verbal play (i.e. the dozens) served as undetected acts of passive aggression and ridicule. Stowe demonstrates through Sam and Andy how play doubles to disrupt the pursuit of an escaped slave. Webb employs play to disrupt labor as it simultaneously ridicules. Wilson employs pure play as an affirmation of childhood.

This dissertation begins with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because of its publication chronology, the novel's evolution into a cultural phenomenon, and the novel's "invention of American Blacks for the whole world" in the 1850s (Yarborough 47). Stowe wrote in a letter to Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the *National Era*, explaining " ... my [writing] object will be to hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible slavery, its reverses, changes, and the negro character, which I have had ample opportunities for studying" (Wilson 260). Research reveals she studied slave narratives, Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery as It Is* (1839), and the minstrel stage. My scholarship addresses the influence of these studies in Stowe's comic black child depictions, particularly the minstrel stage. Stowe justifies humor as a narrative strategy with which to keep the reader engaged with the text – to balance the sentimental melodrama with refreshing comedy. The strategy's success can be marked by the novel's publication

history, with more than 300,000 copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold in the U. S. in one year (Douglass qtd. in Yarborough). Combined with an explosion of "Uncle Tom" ephemera, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* presented Afro-American characters, however derivative and distorted, who leaped with incredible speed to the status of literary paradigms and even cultural archetypes with which subsequent writers – black and white – have had to reckon (Yarborough 47). The character types in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presented a comfortable space in which Stowe could effectively argue for abolitionism. Yet in her pursuit of that greater cause, she sacrificed the humanity of enslaved black children. My scholarship deconstructs Stowe's representations of these children and analyzes the methodology by which she creates a template onto which to build characterization. I examine her strategies of repetition and difference, metonymy, distortion, and exaggeration to represent enslaved black children of the 1850s.

In distinct scenes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the functions of black children range from narrative hook to comic relief, time markers, and symbols of heathenism. The first chapter of this dissertation deconstructs the black child image(s) in each scene and examines salient features of characterization for each child and his/her respective childhood. I dedicate the first section to Stowe's character Harry Harris and his function as a narrative hook. The next section examines slave life through Mose and Pete, and it examines the boys as comic relief. My analysis moves to the Shelby slave children and their depictions as shiftless, comic figures who mark time as the slave escape ensues. Teen characters, Sam and Andy, emerge from the slave children as Stowe's interpretation

of slave tricksters and contented slaves who also protract time. The final section investigates Stowe's depiction of Topsy as a heathenish, wicked composite of the other children who precede her. In addition to Topsy's character as a symbol of racism within the slave community, this section analyzes the child as Stowe's symbol of slave abuse and missionary conversion. Throughout each of these sections, I argue for black-faced minstrelsy's influence in characterization.

Each of the three novels discussed in this dissertation imagines the black child and bondage from different perspectives. Distinctions among the texts include depictions of food and meals, clothing, and homes for the respective children. During mealtime, for example, Stowe reduces Mose and Pete to miniature beasts. The children appear as a mass of hungry, glistening eyes peering from a dark corner of Uncle Tom's cabin. When the boys eat, they prefer taking their meal from the floor as would a house pet. Little Harry Harris also retrieves food from the floor of the Shelby parlor, food that has been thrown at him to reward his circus-like performance.

Published five years later, Frank J. Webb's *The Garies* rejects Stowe's characterizations as the imaginative exaggerations that they are. Webb replaces Stowe's depictions with Charlie Ellis and Kinch DeYounge, young boys who instigate comic misrule akin to that of Stowe's children. But rather than deepen their Otherness, the boys' conduct reifies childhood humanity. They revise the Topsian motif into smart, clever premeditated mayhem. Their ingenious Bre'r Rabbit pranks do not entertain but entrap their oppressors. And Webb transforms slave dialect into refined trash talking

with a minstrel interlocutor's finesse. Instead of comic ignorance, *The Garies* offers educated, intelligent, industrious prototypical males, similar to those whom W. E. B. DuBois would later define as members of the "Talented Tenth," exceptional young African American men "who must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people" (DuBois 75).

*The Garies* departs from Stowe's depictions but exposes how Northern racism others the child. Mrs. Bird's white servants refuse to dine at the same table with young Charlie Ellis. Betsey asks Eliza, "What on earth can induce you to want to eat with a nigger? ... I couldn't do it; my victuals would turn on my stomach" (149). Betsey's remark suggests that the black child is loathsome. Sharing the same dining space with Charlie evokes the same repulsion for the servant as sharing the space with a cockroach. The child must wait to dine separately and after the servants, essentially eating their leftovers. But unlike Stowe's novel, *The Garies* rebukes oppression through example, placing Charlie in a quaint dining scene with Mrs. Bird and in full view of her servants. The scene continues the greater narrative's ongoing rejection of racism. Two years later, Harriet E. Wilson would fully expose the hardships of black childhood and racism in the abolitionist North.

Wilson's *Our Nig* responds to Stowe's depictions and exposes Northern racism through autobiographical fiction. Wilson recounts twelve years of childhood as an indentured servant in the free North, where the cruelties she suffered rival the abuses of Southern slavery. Her autobiography, couched in fiction, illustrates that Mrs. Bellmont,

the primary antagonist, is not far removed from Stowe's plantation mistress Marie St. Clare in her systematic efforts to dehumanize the child, Alfrado Smith. While contemporary scholars refer to *Our Nig* as an "anti-Uncle Tom" novel, I consider her text "a mother tongue technique of talking back ... a stance, an attitude of resistance that includes secrets, misdirection, irony, song, humor, and lying among others" (Stover 7). Through this technique, *Our Nig* corrects black child depictions and benevolent paternalism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, while revealing the abuses of Northern servitude.

*Our Nig* also captures the black child and Otherness at mealtime. The protagonist, Frado Smith must eat a bland, skimpy diet of bread crusts in skim milk. Like the southern slave, the child must eat the food after having completed chores; she must eat the leftovers in a segregated space, standing in the kitchen; and she must eat in less than ten minutes. When the child is permitted to dine while seated at the table, she must again eat leftovers and from the dirty dishes of her oppressor. The act reduces the child's humanity to that of a pet dog. But like Charlie and Kinch, Frado responds with Topsian wickedness.

Webb and Wilson offer plausible models of black children that debunk Stowe's typology. While Stowe subsumes the humanity of enslaved black children with comic sub-human representations, Webb empowers his characters with determination, wit, and guile to sustain self-possession, especially when that self-possession is challenged or threatened. Webb's depictions of African American children render Stowe's images the stereotypes that they are. He further challenges Stowe's mythical representations of



happily enslaved African Americans with an allegorical examination of children in hired service. The texts of *The Garies* and *Our Nig* reduce black child depictions in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Stowe's imaginative excesses.

My scholarship begins with historical inquiry into nineteenth-century black childhood. Those studies include historian Wilma King's *Stolen Childhood* (1995), an examination of enslaved African American children in the American South. King's depictions contrast Stowe's characterizations, and King's scholarship fills in gaps of childhood experience omitted by Stowe. Sociologist Norman Yetman's collection of slave narratives in *Life Under the Peculiar Institution* (1970) provides further historical evidence of Southern enslavement and black childhood. Both King's and Yetman's scholarship proves useful in illustrating facets of bondage illustrated by Harriet Wilson.

Essays in *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, a Casebook* (2007) and *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1986) provided invaluable direction when I began this project. I incorporated analysis of Topsy's characterization with the black-faced minstrel end-man into this project from literary scholar Sarah Meer's *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (2005). I further note the minstrel end-man/interlocutor influence in depictions of Sam and Andy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Charlie Ellis in *The Garies*, and Frado in *Our Nig*.

After briefly examining historical influences, my scholarship shifts to literary analysis. Historian Caroline F. Levander's research posits the child in history and in literature as a "social and a political entity," the site of "a series of representational

possibilities ... a cultural construct that encodes the complex, ever shifting logic of the social worlds that produce it” (16). Taking a cue from Levander, my research encompasses the representational possibilities of the African American child and childhood within each of the novels *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *The Garies and Their Friends*, and *Our Nig*. My research has identified few explicit critical discussions of the black children in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Scholarship addressing black child representations in *The Garies* is minimal. After the publication of *Our Nig*, the novel experienced 124 years of literary obscurity. Literary scholar “Gates could find only five scant references to the novel” during that period (Nagill 335). Current scholarship on *Our Nig* is yet emerging. This dissertation will provide additional scholarship.

Chapter One traces narrative patterns of black child depictions *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The characters Harry Harris, Mose, and Pete, for example, follow a pattern of recurring performances – creating a template which informs the characterizations of the other children. Through a progression of repetition and difference, these characterizations converge and collapse into the child Topsy. She emerges as the fictional representative enslaved black child.

Although Stowe drapes these children with superficial hilarity, they also embody antebellum social hierarchies and subordinated spaces. They enact dramas of progeny versus property, good versus evil, authority versus rascality, and suffering versus redemption within a framework of an idyllic enslaved life. Beneath the surface humor,

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* positions the black child and childhood as sites that invite and sanction abuse, neglect, separation, abandonment, labor, and human trafficking.

Chapter One also briefly explores the representation of black childhood in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through visual culture in the form of the illustrations that accompanied the text. I limit my focus to Hammatt Billings' illustrations in the 1852 Jewett edition as well as George Cruikshank's images in the 1853 British edition of the novel. These illustrations represent particular artistic interpretations of the texts. I discuss the images as instances of visual rhetoric which either reinforce or complement their literary referents. Need an example!!!! The analysis also considers the illustrations as black child rhetoric independent of the text. For instance, Stowe indicates that Harry Harris is four or five years old, but Hammatt Billings renders him as an infant. Cradled in Eliza's arms, they appear as Madonna and child. George Cruikshank takes more artistic license with Harry. The child appears age appropriate in the illustration, but his countenance is uniquely feminine. Images of the other black children do not convey enslavement. Instead, the children appear in scenes that capture them as wild, willful, and unruly.

In Chapter Two, Frank J. Webb dramatically advances models of nineteenth-century black children in *The Garies and Their Friends* (*The Garies*). Rather than yoke black children together as creatures needful of hegemonic and paternalistic direction, Webb presents ironic inversions. From his cast of children, I examine the depictions of Charlie Ellis and Kinch DeYounge as comic inversions of Stowe's creations. To that end, I respond to literary scholar, Samuel Otter, who recommends a critique of the "social

and physical comedy” that the boys create. The boys embody shrewd intellectual tricksterisms and “trash talkin’” dozens, instances where the children shift the object of humor from themselves and project it onto their oppressors – something that stands in opposition to children who *are* the joke in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Comic performance, often slapstick transforms the children from enslaved antebellum stereotypes to visionary prototypes. As such, Webb effectively “changes the joke and slips the yoke” (Ellison 111) pervasive in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* maintains a shadowy presence in *The Garies*. This presence manifests with the Northern practice of hiring children into service. Hired service is Webb’s interpretation of Southern bondage in the North. While he illustrates the vulnerability of black children in these positions, Webb offsets that vulnerability by equipping his characters, Charlie Ellis and Kinch DeYounge, with intelligent wit and guile. Both boys reflect industriousness and intellect as they enact a childhood full of play and mischief. Their comic misrule turns servitude topsy-turvy as it reinforces selfhood.

Charlie and Kinch fulfill hegemonic fears of literacy’s power. Neither child can be “trained” as a servant or slave who dutifully complies with every beck and call of their employers. The boys use clever ruses to become “unhired” from service, and in doing so, they expose hired service as a form of bondage. The novel, then, rejects hired service as a trap that condemns the child to a lifetime of benevolent paternalism. In its place, *The*

*Garies* advocates education and capitalism as paths to selfhood and economic independence.

*The Garies* promotes literacy not only among its characters, but also among its readers through its consistent intertextual references. For instance, Mrs. Bird presents *Robinson Crusoe* as a gift to Charlie for academic excellence, and Charlie's visit to Mrs. Bird vaguely alludes to the beginning of Crusoe's adventures in Yarmouth. The allusions motivate readers to consult Defoe's novel. Naming patterns in *The Garies* bear a striking resemblance to those in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, thus motivating a comparative reading of the latter. *The Garies* also beckons readers to an etymological exercise in the works of Chaucer and Spenser. Mention of the Biblical Ham prompts reading of Noah's post-flood tale and considerations of Southern justification for enslavement of African Americans. *The Garies* thus promotes the practice of reading beyond the novel.

Chapter Three analyzes Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* as an extension of Webb's dialectics on servitude, but more importantly it considers *Our Nig* as a further response to Stowe's enslaved black child depictions. Wilson's thinly veiled autobiography chronicles twelve years of childhood effaced by servitude and fraught with violence. She relates this experience through structures such as the slave narrative, the conversion narrative, and the seduction narrative (Singley 119). *Our Nig* resumes Webb's narrative thread in which he mentions a "charity institution" (177) and alludes to indentured service through a charity girl who resides with the Stevens family. The unnamed child is

vulnerable to Mr. Stevens's arbitrary violence. *Our Nig* offers a detailed catalogue of suffering through indentured service.

After having been abandoned at the Bellmont home, Frado Smith spends her childhood with the Bellmont family as an indentured servant. Mrs. Bellmont's professed Christianity and abolitionist ties could have motivated her to adopt Frado, but Mrs. Bellmont views the child as a servant who can be trained much like a Southern slave. Thus Frado's tale illustrates the methodology by which the she-devil strips the child of humanity and attempts to retrain her into a slave/mule. The tale catalogues adult violence that acts upon the Topsian mythology that black children are virtually indestructible. As such, Frado's servitude with the Bellmonts questions the possibilities of Stowe's Ophelia/Topsy adoption paradigm.

Ophelia, a Northern abolitionist and professed Christian finds slavery reprehensible, but she also finds the black body repulsive. She adopts Topsy *after* witnessing the child experience a spiritual conversion; she adopts Topsy *after* admitting her own bigotry; and she adopts the child as a measure of redemption. Ophelia relocates North where Topsy's humanizing and maturation continue. The child's admittance to the church symbolizes the end of that process. Yet rather than affirm that process by permanently situating Topsy into the Northern community, Stowe expatriates her to Africa. Wilson's novel revises this adoption schema. Her protagonist Alfrado (Frado) is a free mulatta child whose abandonment draws attention to the lack of Northern orphanages and adoptive families. The child's experiences as an indentured servant

posits indentured service as a dangerous option for orphaned children. Through Frado, Wilson illuminates nineteenth-century black child abuse as she exposes fraudulent Northern abolitionists. Two years after the publication of *Our Nig*, Frank J. Webb continues dialectics on black children and servitude, but the variables shift from bondage to freedom, education, and economics.

Webb successfully wrote and published an anti-Tom novel without detection by the one critic most likely to recognize his ruse, Harriet Beecher Stowe. A contemporary of Stowe's, Webb responded to her stereotypes with plausible images of educated middle-class African Americans thriving in the free North. In writing the novel, Webb employed a strategy which would later appear in Charles Chesnutt's *Conjure Woman Tales*. Chesnutt's character, Uncle Julius, spins tales to entertain both the characters within the novel as well as the readers of the novel. Yet close inspection of each tale reveals atrocities of the slave experience. Webb similarly constructs a series of overplots involving the lives of African American families which intersect and overlap. Within this narrative Webb offers rich subtextual discourse on African American children and childhood – a response to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Proof of Webb's successful narrative genius lay in Stowe's preface to *The Garis* where she questions the novel's progressive socio-economic and political themes. "Are the race at present held as slaves capable of freedom, self-government, and progress?" (Stowe, *The Garis* Preface). In her preface, at least, Stowe neither acknowledges the close intertextual relationship with her *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, nor does she acknowledge *The Garis* as a response her novel.

Although *The Garies* was published in England and for a British audience, copies may have been available to American readers. According to literary scholar, Eric Gardner, the publisher's distribution network included a New York imprint, but "scholars have not yet found record of any significant American response (300). Textual evidence in *Our Nig* suggests that Harriet Wilson may have read a copy *The Garies*, or that she was aware of the novel's contents. Her narrative employs phraseology associated with Webb and his novel. For instance, Stowe praises Webb with such terms as "cultivated and refined" (Betz and Carnes 589), yet she questions enslaved African Americans' progressive abilities. Webb addresses these attitudes through a reverend gentleman at Mrs. Thomas' dinner party "whose remarks respecting the intelligence of the children of Ham had been particularly disparaging" (Webb 20). *Our Nig*, of course, offers literary evidence of cultivation and refinement as well as progressivism in the depiction of African American families.

Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*'s white characters, James and Abby, resume dialectics on black intellect Mrs. Bellmont argues against Frado's education because she [Bellmont] "was in doubt about the utility of attempting to educate people of color, who were incapable of elevation" (Wilson 30). James and Abby also discussed "the prevalent opinion of the public, that people of color are really inferior; incapable of cultivation and refinement" (Wilson 73). Wilson's intertextual signification on Stowe's preface to *The Garies* seems more than coincidental. Her novel not only corrects Stowe's narrative



depictions of African American children, but exposes Stowe's conflicted attitudes about the population for whom she so fervently advocated.

Both Webb's and Wilson's responses to African American stereotype were preceded by William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or the President's Daughter* (1853). Their responses to Stowe were followed by such works as Harriet Jacobs's autobiography of enslavement and seduction in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Frances E. W. Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice* which appeared serially in the *Christian Recorder* (1869). In *Minnie's Sacrifice* readers can recognize "a variation on a theme or evidence of intertextuality among *Clotel*, *The Garies and Their Friends*, and even *Our Nig*" (Foster, Introduction xxx). At the turn of the century, scholarship of Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901) and W. E. B. Dubois's "Talented Tenth" (1903) continue social activism in positive anti-Tom representations of African American youth. In more recent years, the Topsian archetype has appeared in Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), Hal Roach's *Our Gang* series (1920s-1940s), Robin Harris's *Bébé's Kids* (1993), and the infamous Martin Lawrence sitcom character, Shenéneh Jenkins (1992 – 1997).

This project regards nineteenth-century black childhoods as an intensely rich interpretive site of the literal and temporal worlds that these children inhabited. From the Topsian antics of Harriet Beecher Stowe's fictional children, to the mayhem and mischief of Frank Webb's characters, and the rascality of Harriet Wilson's Frado, my dissertation argues that these nineteenth-century representations of black children and childhood are more than mere entertainment.

CHAPTER II  
*UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

Introduction

Chapter I examines Harriet Beecher Stowe's fictional depictions of enslaved black children in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* alongside their historical referents. Her artful creations or *pictures* of the children grow primarily out of plantation mythology and the minstrel stage. In one regard, the kids appear as happy frolicking creatures for whom the plantation is a playground. On the other hand, the novel characterizes black children as a comic sub-human species with bestial and savage predispositions. Their performances and antics project wild, willful, and unruly creatures who are not only insensate to abuse, but invite it. The resulting characterizations are little more than caricatures that reinforce nineteenth-century hegemonic views of and attitudes towards the enslaved African American.

The author became familiar with slavery, in part, through slave narratives of such notables as Solomon Northrop, Frederick Douglass, and Rev. Josiah Henson. "She had no firsthand knowledge [of slavery] until the family moved for a few years to Cincinnati: there and on short trips to Kentucky, she formed the impressions that went into the book" (Strausbaugh 158-158). Stowe was also reported to have slept with a copy of Theodore

Dwight Weld's *Slavery as It Is* (1839), a text that recounts the slave condition in graphic details.

These texts, as powerful as they were, did not move the masses to a sweeping condemnation of slavery, but they certainly gave Stowe sufficient historical insight into the circumstances of enslaved black children. From these writings, however, she realized that "no one would read a novel that was "relentlessly grim" (Donovan 62), so she chose to balance grim tones and depressing scenes of slavery with comic relief. Her black children fulfilled those comedic designs.

It is noteworthy to acknowledge that historian Forrest Wilson argues that Stowe's characters grew from her "own life-experience" (270), citing the characters Topsy and Sam as examples. The novel's depictions of black children, however, support the premise that Stowe relied on other sources, including slave narratives, Weld's scholarship, and most importantly the minstrel tradition. Living in Cincinnati during the height of minstrel popularity, Stowe would have been familiar with the tradition even if she had not attended shows. Her exposure could have come by way of excited theatergoers who often brought the show from the stage into the streets and parlors with vivid descriptions and performance reenactments.

The minstrel stage transformed the ante-bellum slave figure into a vulgar exaggeration of imaginative excesses. The slave's ragged clothing labeled among his "peculiarities and comicalities" became the minstrel's ill-fitting clown-like attire. Minstrel caricatures of slave physiology transformed into large shining eyes set against a

blackened face, complemented with a large gaping mouth. Slave hair became minstrel wool. The minstrels spoke in a “nigger” dialect laden with malapropisms and conundrums which they employed in nonsensical comic verbal play for audiences.

Minstrel influence is evident in *Uncle Toms Cabin*’s exaggerated depictions of black children. For example, black children appear with iconic woolly heads, shining eyes, jet-black skin, and brilliant white teeth. Each black child scene incorporates a facet of the minstrel stage: performing grotesque song and dance, creating mayhem characteristic of the five-member minstrel stage team, and engaging in verbal-play that emulates the minstrel interlocutor and end-man. Harry’s performance, for example, reenacts minstrel Thomas D. Rice’s “surprise in a poke.” Sam and Andy, on the other hand, perform the minstrel end-man’s verbal play. And Topsy, whom historian W. T. Lhamon Jr. argues “came chiefly from the minstrel show” (143), performs Billy Whitlock’s locomotive whistle and train sequence. In a letter to Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the *National Era*, Stowe writes:

My vocation is simply that of a *painter*, and my object will be to hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible Slavery, its reverses, changes, and the negro character, which I have had ample opportunities for studying. There is no arguing with *pictures* and everybody is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not. (Wilson, Forrest 260)

She “owe[d] a great deal to darky figures that capered across minstrel stages<sup>1</sup> and white imaginations in the antebellum years” (Yarborough 47). Her characterizations fully realize the minstrel manipulation of African American physiology and culture into exaggerated song, dance, slapstick antics, and verbal play.

Harry Harris’s song, dance, and mime, then, initiate a motif that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* imaginatively realizes through the remaining black children. He begins as an exotic beauty, but through performance, he transforms into a trained exotic pet. Mose and Pete, Uncle Tom’s rough sons, entertain readers with antics and pranks. Yet they are the black, wooly headed creatures whose eyes shine from a dark corner, creatures who prefer to take meals from the floor, and creatures who seem completely unaffected by violent force. Other slave children disparage the villain, Haley, with slapstick antics, but those antics interpret the violence of angry whip flashes as sport. So along performance trajectories, the novel’s black children represent wild, willful, and unruly creatures who are not only insensate to abuse, but invite it. Along the performance trajectory their characterizations regress into Otherness.

The children’s comicalities collapse into the lone figure of wild, wicked, and willful Topsy. Her depiction signals a dramatic imagistic shift from the benign clownish figures of her predecessors to a loathsome creature. For Topsy, brutality is the stuff of jokes. While her characterization poses a myriad of representational possibilities, most

---

<sup>1</sup> Traveling black-faced performers grew in popularity throughout the United States in the late 1820s. By the mid-1840s minstrelsy popularity had “swept the nation” with minstrel companies settling in Philadelphia, New York, or Boston. Some shows had consecutive runs for a decade (Toll 28, 31, 32).

prominent among those is the heathenish savage in need of Christian civilizing influences.

The novel takes a more serious approach to Topsy by posing her as a demonic figure undaunted by earthly powers. She is an uncontrollable child be-deviled by slavery, and she malevolently manipulates members of the St. Clare household who disdain her. Shaped by Gothic imagery into a grotesque uncontrollable “thing” that elicits loathing, Topsy symbolizes the savage which must be civilized and Christianized in order to ensure the success of the novel’s conversion agenda.

Topsy’s character grows, in part, out of the novel’s religious abolitionist imperative. Stowe’s millennial views were shaped by both the apocalyptic views of the Millerites who believed that earth would suffer great trials before the Second Coming and Jonathan Edwards’s doctrines of the fulfillment “of a golden age on earth” before the Second Coming (Strout 378). She feared that the sin of slavery would not escape some form of Divine retribution. So in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “[t]he eschatological expectation is always present as a reverberating note in the novel’s thematic chords” (Strout 379). The final Judgment manifests in the novel through numerous exhortations and St. Clare’s dialogue. In this context, the novel as an abolitionist text works toward a peaceful golden age in order to escape Divine retribution.

The novel’s theme of Divine retribution scaffolds the characterization and arrival of Topsy. Though Stowe’s novel as a religious and apocalyptic text is a body of scholarship unto itself, I restrict my analysis to apocalyptic warnings. My discussion

briefly catalogues and examines world and national events in the years leading up to 1850. I argue for these events as omens of St. Clare's "dies irae" and as examples of Stowe "entertain[ing] the possibility of a violent slave rebellion" in the novel (Donovan 45). In other words, Stowe repeatedly warns that slavery will incur God's wrath, and she entertains the possibility that His wrath may manifest in the form of slave rebellions. To that end, I argue that Topsy's miniature rebellions forewarn the maturation of adult slave insurrections that brutality cannot control. The child's ability to turn the St. Clare household upside down hints at the power of the slave, brutalized by the institution, to successfully incite rebellious anarchy, war perhaps.

The novel's other slave children perform multiple narrative functions. They are readerly bait, narrative hooks that strike the imagination, while challenging racial sensibilities and "right feelings." Their grotesque song and dance entertains audiences within and without the world of the novel. They are rebellious agents of retribution for the novel's villains. Their mayhem protracts the narrative's temporal time to assist the slave escape while doubling as an emotional outlet for the melodramatic plot lines. Their slapstick comedy functions much like a belly laugh that interrupts heightened reader tensions. For instance circus mayhem between the Shelby slave children and Haley deflate tensions arising from the sale of Tom and little Harry. These narrative moments provide opportunities for readers to participate vicariously in black children's pandemonium on a mythical playground while simultaneously and temporally distancing themselves from the racial Other. Although Stowe indicates that comedy balances the

novel's atmosphere, it also sustain readership. Strategically, her black child depictions are a clever marketing tool.

I briefly examine artist's illustrations in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as contemporaneous interpretations and two-dimensional extensions of Stowe's narrative "pictures." The 1852 American edition of Stowe's novel carried six illustrations by the artist Hammatt Billings who attempted to create images that closely aligned with the text. The 1852 British edition carried twenty-seven illustrations by artist George Cruikshank, who took more artist license with images. The images reflect each artist's understanding and translation of the text into visual terms. Acknowledging that interpretations and discussions of illustrations from both artists warrant their own separate body of scholarship, I limit my discussion exclusively to the black children.

For all the possible narrative functions that the children serve in this abolitionist novel, there are few narrative attempts to relate the historical circumstances of enslaved African American children. Given Stowe's desire not to write a novel with relentless despair, her depictions of the children often neglect realities. Consequently, she exercises "a vulgar eclecticism." She "chooses what makes 'good copy'; ...distorts as far as desirable; ... [and] omits at pleasure" (Gaines 202). In writing this chapter, I challenge Stowe's "good copy" her distorted characterizations, and her omission of historical realities.



### Harry Harris: Stowe's "Pig in a Poke"

Harry Harris, the first black child who appears in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is a uniquely handsome and clever four or five-year-old. He enters the Shelby parlor during negotiations between Mr. Shelby, a slave owner, and Mr. Haley, a slave speculator.<sup>2</sup> Shelby has agreed to sell Tom, but Haley wants more. No sooner than he asks, "Well, haven't you a boy or gal that you could throw in with Tom?" little Harry enters the parlor (*UTC* 2). The timely entrance gives Shelby an opportunity to show off the child's talents while shifting the narrative focus shifts from the slave trade to the slave child. Harry also functions as a narrative hook for Stowe's intended readers. Prior to his performance, the narrative takes pause to introduce him in extended imagery and trace his profile in glorious detail. His hair, Stowe writes, "... fine as floss silk hung in glossy curls about his round dimpled face." Harry's "rich long [eye] lashes" complement his "large dark eyes, full of fire and softness" (*UTC* 3). The portraiture and its lyrical depiction engage the reader in a suspended gaze upon the exotic "dark and rich style of his beauty" (3). Unlike the "coarse linen shirt" rationed to children of field slaves (*Narrative* 24), the little boy dons a "gay robe of scarlet and yellow plaid, carefully made

---

<sup>2</sup> I use here Former slave D. Davis's definition of speculator. "De speculators was dem folkses what ... brought [slaves] and sold 'em and dey would be gwine round through de country all de time with a great gang of peoples ... a-tradin', and a-buyin' and a sellin'" (Yetman 78).

and neatly fitted” (*UTC* 3). Although Harry is black, the novel introduces him as a racially white<sup>3</sup> beauty.

The illustration of Harry, titled “Eliza comes to tell Uncle Tom that she is running away to save her child” in the 1852 edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* extends the novel’s racial designs. Artist Hammatt Billings renders the four-year-old as a white infant in swaddling clothes (fig. 1). The bright child cradled in Eliza’s arms and set against an illuminated backdrop conjures the image of a Madonna and child framed by heavenly light, thus conveying an added sense of urgency to the slaves’ flight. The fugitives’ illumination also casts shadows, or cosmic darkness upon Tom and Chloe’s blackened bodies. The drawing is an example of the claim that “Although Stowe unquestionably sympathized with the slaves, her commitment to challenging the claim of black inferiority was frequently undermined by her own endorsement of racial stereotypes” (Yarborough 47). Light spatially separates the two pairs of characters and enforces racial caste within the group. Harry’s likeness is closer to that of nineteenth-century white readers than the images of Tom and Chloe.

Drawings by George Cruikshank in the 1852 British edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* appeal to Harry’s racial whiteness, but from a different perspective. In the illustration titled “Valuing the Human Article,” the child is the focal point in an array of characters (see fig. 2.) The artist foregrounds and centers the child to draw attention to

---

<sup>3</sup> James Baldwin writes that “we have only the author’s word” that Harry’s parents, Eliza and George are black. “[T]hey are, in all other respects, as white as she can make them ... They are a race apart from Topsy” (497).

his shoulder-length curly hair and to contrast the plaid “gay robe” with a purely white face. Harry’s pose, designed to capture performance, balances a slight comic aspect with semblances of femininity. The artist’s concept of a feminized Harry is less threatening. It is a way to make the black male palatable to white readers. The feminized Harry also reinforces vulnerability by rendering the image of a little white girl who has been sold away from her mother into slavery. Little Harry feminized as a white female gives greater importance to the slaves’ escape.

In another illustration, Cruikshank places Harry as the focal point of a seminal family portrait (see fig. 3.). Natural sunlight beaming through an open doorway illuminates the child’s face as he embraces Eliza. She affectionately strokes his hair with one hand while gripping his forearm with the other. Implicit in her grip is her fear of losing Harry to slave trade. As Harry looks upward towards George, both parents reciprocate with loving gazes downward to the child. Harry’s white face contrasts the darker images of his parents, positioning him not only as the center of the portrait but the focus of slavery dialectics. His is not the stereotypical image of the black slave.

As Harry’s performance unfolds in the novel, his characterization descends from exotic beauty into Otherness. After affectively engaging the reader, the narrative shifts from imagery to atmosphere and the child’s “certain comic air.” While hinting at performance, Stowe announces Harry’s chattel status by indirection: “[He] had not been unused to being petted and noticed by his master” (*UTC* 3). Historian Eugene Genovese writes that, “generally [masters and mistresses] doted on [slave children] as if they were

playthings or pets” (512). The narrative progression reveals that to Mr. Shelby, Harry is both.

The little boy is the one-of-a-kind enslaved novelty, the human version of a toy marionette. He is the thing that will twist, contort, and mime upon command, something to proudly display to others. Harry’s performance would be unseemly, vulgar, and grotesque for genteel white children, but his African heredity sanctions the behavior. Haley will later prove that Shelby views the child as a ready source of entertainment.

As dialogue begins, Shelby emphatically greets the child as the black Other: “‘Hulloa, Jim Crow!’ ... whistling and snapping a bunch of raisins toward him” (*UTC* 3). The greeting immediately shifts into an imperative monologue suggesting that Harry’s training has “cultivat[ed] ... an awareness of the southern social hierarchy and [his] subordinated place within it” (Schwartz 91). Shelby’s imperative, therefore, carries a twofold purpose: first to cue the child’s performance, and secondly, to demonstrate to the slave trader that the child is indeed trained. Stowe reinforces training by patterning Shelby’s language on the model of an animal trainer.

From this perspective, the child appears a well-trained exotic lap-dog on which the owner dotes. Shelby commands Harry to perform a trick: “pick that up, now” (*UTC* 3). The child demonstrates good training by scampering to recover from the floor raisins that have been thrown to him -- much like a dog would retrieve a morsel. Shelby next orders, “Come here, Jim Crow” (3), so that he may pat the child on the head and chuck

him under the chin. The scene conjures images of the doting owner bestowing non-verbal praise of “well-done” upon his obedient pet.

This praise also doubles as encouragement for Shelby’s next imperative. “Now Jim, show this gentleman how you can dance and sing.” The child sings one of those “wild grotesque songs common among the negroes” while performing “comic evolutions” rhythmically to the tune (*UTC* 3). From nomenclature “Jim Crow”, and one-word commands (“come,” “fetch”) associated with pet training, to head-patting and chin-chucking, Stowe drapes Harry in imagery that reduces the child to a pampered Other, a beloved pet with “wild grotesque” utterances.

Stowe also configures the child as a buffoon and the African American as a mimic. After throwing a bit of fruit to reward the child’s performance, Shelby gives yet another command.

‘Now, Jim, walk like old Uncle Cudjoe, when he has the rheumatism’ ... Instantly the flexible limbs of the child assumed the appearance of deformity and distortion, as, with his back humped up, and his master’s stick in his hand, he hobbled about the room, his childish face drawn into a doleful pucker, and spitting from right to left, in imitation of an old man. (*UTC* 3)

Harry’s performance may have reminded Southern readers of slaves “dancing all over” or “agitat[ing] every part of the body at the same time ... all the contortions, and springs, and flings, and kicks” (Stampp 366). But Northern readers would have been more

acquainted with Thomas D. Rice, who created and made famous the “Jim Crow”<sup>4</sup> role on the minstrel stage (Nathan 50). Notice the similarity between Harry’s performance and the following description of Rice’s minstrel dancing. “How strained, sprawling, and distorted his posture was, and yet how nonchalant – how unusually grotesque with its numerous sharp angles, and yet how natural!” (Nathan 52). Each instance of performance turns on the display of natural physical dexterity and yet distortion. Harry mimics T. D. Rice’s minstrel creation and exploitation of slave culture.

This scene also conjures one of Rice’s most famous performances (Lhamon Jr. 97). In 1832, the minstrel improvised a scene in which “he danced out onto the stage carrying a gunny sack<sup>5</sup> over his back.” In the second verse, Rice sang “O Ladies and Gentlemen, I’d have for you to know / That I’ve got a little darky here that jumps Jim Crow.” From the sack jumped a four-year-old boy, “dressed in a ragged imitation of Rice.” The child “exactly the age Stowe assigns Harry ... danced and sang a junior version of ‘Jump Jim Crow’” (Lhamon Jr. 97-98).

Stowe mimics Rice’s theatrics by staging Harry’s impromptu entrance into Shelby’s parlor. He coincidentally appears, just as Haley asks about a boy or girl for sale. He is the surprise tumbling out of Shelby’s metaphorical gunny sack, his home.

---

<sup>4</sup> Rice had heard an old crippled Negro hostler singing in a stableyard as he rubbed down the horses, and had seen him dancing an odd limping dance as he worked – ‘rockin’ de heel.’ Rice studied the dance and learned the song, with its refrain: “Wheel about, turn about / Do jis so, / An’ ebery time I wheel about / I jump Jim Crow (Rourke 99).

<sup>5</sup> A sack of “a coarse material used chiefly for sacking and made from the fibres or jute (or in some parts) from sunn-hemp” (*OED*). “A sack made of gunny or burlap used for coarse commodities” (*Online Dictionary*).

Shelby's "Jim Crow" greeting and whistling to Harry function in tandem as dramatic devices that introduce the child with accompanying music. Harry's performance, meanwhile, is Stowe's version of Rice's "surprise in a poke." It is subtle but apparent nonetheless. Stowe's surprise disrupts the grave tone of slave trade and temporarily suspends the transaction with humorous theatrics.

Shelby's parlor, in this context, becomes a nineteenth-century stage onto which the black child performs as circus animal, minstrel, and buffoon. The slave trader, Haley, demonstrates approbation by rewarding the child with thrown bits of food. In one regard, Haley's "uproarious" laughter and thrown food reflect nineteenth-century interactions between audience and actors on the minstrel stage. But in Shelby's parlor, the scene does not achieve the same comic effect. Harry, who must either catch or retrieve this food from the floor, models "training" of enslaved black children as creatures for entertainment. With the child's humanity reduced to caricature, Harry is the object of laughter both within and without the novel.

For Stowe's readers who had not witnessed the slave institution firsthand, Harry reinforces hegemonic beliefs that black children are a sub-human species. Although Harry is obviously human, his admixture of African blood and his slave status dilute his humanity. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* aligns Harry's intellect with that of a trained animal and mimicry. He lacks a sense of worth that would reject thrown food or eating from the floor as a pet dog. The novel drapes him in layers of bestiality and blackface minstrelsy as it usurps his humanity. Readers introduced to the slave child through Harry would be

left to agree that slavery is benign and that black children as sub-human species warrant slavery's paternalism. Ironically, Harry's depiction negates abolitionist assertions of slave cruelty. Instead, his character is a hollow guise that suggests enslaved children are pampered and petted playthings of indulgent owners.

Thrice removed from reality, the child's characterization represents a contrived black essence. In the world of the novel, Harry's behavior appears "to act within the normative cultural patterns" (Lowrance 40). The novel's cultural norm for black children, however, is problematic. It stems from a manufactured Otherness. In characterizing the little boy, Stowe invokes nineteenth-century theatrical "art" to represent life – "sifted, tried, and tested as a reality" (Stowe, *A Key*, I, 1). But she lifts his characterization, in part, from blackface minstrelsy.

Minstrels like T. D. Rice traveled the country to observe African American dress and behavior. When they returned to the stage, they blackened their skin, dressed in ill-fitting, ragged, outrageous clothing and performed "interpretations" of their observations. They exploited and manipulated Afro-Americans and their culture to please and benefit white Americans audiences (Toll 51). Many Northern whites who did not know what Southern slaves looked like found the minstrels' exaggerations "looked different enough to be authentic" representations of blacks (34). "When the music began, they exploded into a frenzy of grotesque and eccentric movements." Their performance suggested that music triggered such behavior among African Americans, reinforcing the notion that



slaves were preoccupied with play. Toll concludes that the energy and excitement of the minstrel shows “provided an emotional outlet” for theater goers (36).

In constructing Harry, Stowe’s trumps reality with minstrel-inspired imagination. Harry can never be white, just as minstrel performers cannot really be black. His whiteness is an inversion of the blackface. She paints the black child white and sets him into grotesque and eccentric movements of blackface performance. Given the widespread popularity of minstrelsy, Northern readers would have been familiar with Harry’s movements. Although his characterization is a hollow substitute for reality, Harry’s entertainment provides an emotional outlet for novel’s characters well as readers.

As an abolitionist tool, his performance reflects the child’s survival strategy while exposing a moral darkness in both men. He responds to Shelby’s racial “Jim Crow”<sup>67</sup> imperatives and manipulates the two by moving them to laughter. As such, Harry’s performance “introduces a paradigm for marginalized characters’ survival in a phallogentric culture that implies both subservience toward and disparagement of the masters” (Lowrance 40). The child further exposes Shelby, the slave owner, and Haley, the slave trader, as sources of oppression. As the men laugh, throw food to the child, and pet him like a dog, they also consider his value in the slave market.

---

<sup>6</sup> On the minstrel stage, the term “Jim Crow” was assigned to a plantation type of African American. This stage stereotype was allegedly created and made famous by the actor Thomas D. Rice (Nathan 50).

<sup>7</sup> The footnote is repeated here as in the text of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. “Stereotyped name for a black person, especially a singer, clown, or minstrel: from the folk song ‘Jim Crow.’” From the 1882 through the 1960s the name ‘Jim Crow’ was applied to state and local laws in the South that enforced segregation or prevented African Americans from voting” (3). Jim Crow is generally a derogatory term.

For Harry, the distance between performance and the auction block is very slippery. Haley, thoroughly entertained by Harry's song and dance, boasts that the "little devil is such a comical, musical concern." The child, further packaged as a trained pet shifts in subject position to the marketable Other, reigniting talk of the slave trade between the two men. Smitten by the child's exotic beauty, Haley remarks that little Harry is "just the article," a "must have" for the market (*UTC* 4). So while the child as a performing Other tentatively "slips the yoke" (Ellison 45) of Otherness onto the slavers, his effective manipulation of the men ultimately binds him deeper into slavery. The child's entrance initially interrupts and draws the narrative away from subject of slave trade, but his subsequent performance leads a discursive path back to the same. "Harry is rewarded for playing at blackness with being sold down river" (Lhamon Jr. 98).

Haley's envisions children like Harry as miniature ornaments: servants, "doormen, waiters, and "tend[ers]" ... who "set the [plantation] off" (*UTC* 4). His vision is realized later in the novel in two separate settings. In one instance Dodo, "a handsome, bright-eyes mulatto" with "curling hair hung round a high, bold forehead" (*UTC* 231), has been purchased "for his handsome face. Dodo's handsome face was intended "to be a match to the handsome pony" (232) recently purchased for Henrique. Dodo's position as a complement to a pony equates his humanity with a brute. The young Dodo, like a young pony, gets a "breaking in" (232), but from another child, young Henrique who attempts to emulate his slave owner father. Alfred. The father, in turn, justifies Henrique's cruelty and Dodo's inhumanity by asserting that "Dodo is a perfect sprite, --

no amount of whipping can hurt him” (233). Children in service positions were no less vulnerable to arbitrary violence than those who labor in the fields.

Actual slave children, like the young Harriet Jacobs were keenly aware of their subservient and service positions. Her narrative recounts early years of childhood under the auspices and protection of her free grandmother. The teenage Jacobs was forced to move into Dr. Flint’s home under the pretext of service. In that service position, she considered “waiting” the table for Dr. Flint and his bride to be embarrassing (*Incidents* 224). While in the home, she endured more humiliation from the sexually aggressive Flint, but resisted his covert designs on her.

The market in black children was a reality of slavery. Historian Kenneth Stampp writes, “Traders frequently gave public notice that they had children under the age of ten for sale apart from their mothers” (264). Interestingly, this trade reflects the reality and danger that “[i]n the chief exporting states, owners could legally separate children of any age from their mothers” (252). Harry and Dodo fall into this group. Some planters purchased young black children in order to “[instill] habits of obedience and subservience” (Schwartz 89). Other planters were more concerned with placing the children directly into domestic service. Haley’s market concerns for Harry are with the latter group.

Stowe also employs black children to “set-off” narrative portraiture in the chapter titled “In Which Property Gets into an Improper State of Mind.” In a “small country hotel” (*UTC* 89), imagery follows a tableaux of the bar-room inhabitants. The focus

moves from the altitude of “Great, tall, raw-bones Kentuckians, attired in hunting shirts” to “Long-legged gentlemen” seated at each end, frame the fireplace. The lens stops at “little negroes, all rolled into corners” on the floor with “shot-pouches, game-bags, and hunting-dogs” (89). Former slave John Finnely gives some insight into the children’s purpose:

Massa used me for huntin’ and use me for de gun rest. When him have de long shot I bends over and puts de hands on de knees and Massa puts his gun on my back for to get the good aim. What him kills I runs and fetches and carries de game for him. I turns de squirrels for him and I walks around de tree and de squirrel see me and go to Massa’s side de tree and he gets shot. (Yetman 124)

From this perspective, the narrative reduces the slave children and equates them to the hunting dogs which they accompany the group. Finnely illustrates that the hunters employ the children much as they would the dogs, to chase and retrieve game. Equally, the children are human tools, stands upon which the hunters can mount and aim their weapons. Rather than children, the kids are little negroes, blended with hunting equipment and hunting dogs because they fulfill the same purpose. Narratively, the “little negroes” are décor that “set off” the hunters and complement the author’s bar-room scene.

Similarly, Harry’s introduction and performance “set off” the novel’s first chapter as readerly bait for the text that follows. His performance launches a motif that reappears in depictions of the other children as the novel unfolds. Each occurrence of black children signals an interlude from the novel’s sentimentality and melodrama. In each

occurrence, the children are the creators and the butts of humor. Each occurrence resumes regression of the black child from humanity to Otherness. That regression slopes along valences of performance.

The performance motif falls into a schema of synecdoche and repetition reinforcing the children as a wild, unruly, wickedly laughable Other. For instance, Uncle Tom's sons, Mose and Pete, engage in antics-driven roughhousing and pranks. From Uncle Tom's cabin, the narrative diffuses performance among the many Shelby slave children and narrows to the teenage pair, Sam and Andy. It rests on the lone figure of Topsy, a child who renders a crude repetition of Harry's song and dance. The children are "all are caught up in a system of endless cross-reference in which it is impossible to refer to one without referring to all the rest" (Tompkins 514), sustaining manufactured images of enslaved children and black childhood.

Through Harry, we are drawn into Mrs. Stowe's political enterprise and marketing endeavor. The child's depiction, performance, and commodification trigger his subsequent sale. As such, Harry symbolizes an ever-present reality for slave mothers, but a "white child "in chains was more pitiful to behold than Africans similarly placed" (Brown, Sterling 45). Harry's racial coding gives urgency and agency to his flight from slavery. His performance launches a series of black child depictions that Stowe attributes to narrative balance. As objects of laughter, they serve as "emotional outlets" for readers absorbed in an abundance of sentimental melodrama. Thus while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exposes slavery's cruelties, it simultaneously exploits the black child and black childhood

in order to maintain readership. Initiating this strategy is a “wholly adorable [white, black] child” (Baldwin 497).

### Mose and Pete: Come Ye Sinners

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* enforces racial caste among its black children through physical boundaries and social hierarchies. Mose and Pete, for instance, are Harry Harris's social inferiors. Unlike Harry who is the child of genteel house slaves, Mose and Pete are progeny of rustic Tom and Chloe. Tom and Chloe maintain high political positions on the Shelby farm as manager and cook, yet ultimately their black complexions and lack of cultural refinement cast them as inferior. While the narrative acknowledges Tom and Chloe's union, it does not legitimize their marriage by ceremony or surname. They are simply known as the couple Tom and Chloe, leaving the entire family bereft of “entitles.”<sup>8</sup> But Mose and Pete are sons to loving, dignified parents who are held in high regard on the Shelby farm.

The chapter titled, “An Evening in Uncle Tom's Cabin” (I, iv) introduces Mose and Pete through “the benevolence of slavery” dialectics, beginning with a detailed panoramic view of Tom's cabin exterior. Nestled in beautiful pastoral imagery of fruit trees, an assortment of flora, and vegetable gardens, Tom's cabin is described as a mythic cottage with a fairy tale appeal. Tom and Chloe are permitted privacy and indulgences: beds for adults and children, a large piece of carpeting, and a quasi kitchen with table,

---

<sup>8</sup> Former slave Lorenzo Russell gives his explanation for the absence of slave surnames: “In dem days cullud people just like mules and hosses. Dey didn't have no last name” (Yetman 112).

chairs, and china. In comparison to the cramped, dirty, slave cabin that often housed more than one family, Tom's home is well appointed and luxuriously spacious. All is well. Slavery *is* good in Uncle Tom's cabin.

Depictions of Tom's dwelling are certainly incongruous with historical descriptions of plantation slave cabins; however, a nineteenth-century dwelling such as his was possible for African Americans unyoked from slavery. Harriet Jacobs's childhood residence, her grandmother's home, provides some clarity. Among the grandmother's furnishings were beds covered with white quilts and a large trunk of bedding and table cloths. These items, according to Jacobs, represented "comfort and respectability (*Incidents* 191-193). But Jacobs's grandmother was a free black woman living independently and successfully operating a small home-based business, selling "crackers, cakes, and preserves" (127). Therefore, the articles of comfort and respectability reflect the grandmother's freedom, free enterprise, and paid labor as opposed to indulgences of benevolent slave owners. Comparatively speaking, Tom's home is the exception, rather than the rule, to the historical slave cabin.

The narratives of both Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington describe childhood homes where the comforts of Tom's cabin would have been extraordinary. Douglass's bed was the "cold damp clay floor." To keep warm, he crawled into a bag used to carry corn, "head in and feet out" (Douglass, *Narrative* 39). For Washington, the home was "a typical log cabin, about fourteen by sixteen feet square" which housed a family of four (*Up From Slavery* 1). "There was no wooden floor," just the "naked

earth.” He and his siblings “slept in and on a bundle of filthy rags laid upon the dirt floor” (3). There was no trundle-bed<sup>9</sup> or bed of any kind for either Douglass or Washington.

Nineteenth-century historian Theodore Weld’s scholarship is consistent with both narratives. In his collection of narratives, Rev. Francis Hawley describes slave huts “from ten to fifteen feet square, built of logs, and covered ... with boards, about four feet long” and clay floor (95). By comparison, Uncle Tom’s mythic cabin is *par excellence*. Stowe, having read Weld’s text in addition to slave narratives would have known the historical distinguishing features of the slave cabin. Tom’s home exemplifies her narrative choice of pleasantries over hard grim facts, conveying the misinformation that enslaved children were thriving in relative comfort.

Slaves’ deplorable living conditions, historically, were equaled by yearly clothing allowances, monthly food allocations, and year-round forced labor. Unlike the previous depiction of Harry neatly dressed in a gay robe, there is no mention of Mose’ and Pete’s attire. Tom’s clothing may offer some insight. For his trip “down South,” Chloe packs “flannels for rhumatis,” old and new shirts, and mended stockings. Tom’s garments loosely parallel Douglass’s catalogue of clothing allotment: men were given “two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers ... one jacket, one pair of trousers for the winter ...

---

<sup>9</sup> Uncle Tom’s children Mose, Pete, and Polly sleep in “a rude box of a trundle-bed.” The footnote describes, A low bed that can be pushed under a higher one. (23).



195)one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes” (*UTC* 83). For children, clothing was determined by labor readiness. Douglass writes:

The children unable to work in the field had neither shoes, stockings, jackets, nor trousers, given to them; their clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts per year. When these failed them, they went naked until the next allowance-day. Children from seven to ten years old, of both sexes, almost naked, might be seen at all seasons of the year. (*Narrative* 24)

Young Booker T. Washington, recalls that the “most trying childhood ordeal ... was the wearing of a flax shirt,” equating the shirt’s initial torturous pain to “the extraction of a tooth,” “a dozen or more chestnut burs,” or “a hundred small pin-points” (*Up From Slavery* 8). Had Washington chosen not to wear the shirt, he like the slave children whom Douglass witnessed, would have been *au naturel*.

The novel noticeably omits clothing depictions for Mose and Pete. The notion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* depicting “shirted” black boys in rambunctious horseplay may have been too revealing for polite society. In the slave institution, “cost-conscious owners paid little attention to growth patterns and allowed boys to wear shirts well beyond a time when they met ordinary standards of modesty” (King 16). Since clothing for slave children was determined by the ability to work, Mose and Pete would have, at best, donned “shirts.” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* neither states nor implies labor for Mose and Pete that would require male attire. Thus, depictions of prepubescent boys in “shirts” and rolling about on the cabin floor, tickling each other in next to nothing may have well been too “unscriptural” for the genteel author. The boys in shirts may have also contradicted

her abolitionist designs especially when Topsy appears later in the novel wearing a “shirt of bagging” (*UTC* 207).

Artist George Cruikshank illustrates a celebratory scene in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* where the barefooted Mose and Pete are attired in clothing of the owning class. (fig. 4). George Shelby appears standing before the dancers and directing the entertainment. A second illustration depicts the boys neatly dressed in trousers, shirts, and shoes (fig. 5). Their clothing, neither ill-fitting nor ragged, extends the novel’s idea of patriarchal benevolence but misrepresents historical accounts. Polly’s single revealing garment is the artist’s nod at slave infancy and innocence.

Cruikshank’s images of the three children suggest a preoccupation with play and an indifference to nudity. Yet arguably, the same image assigns immodesty and indecency to the slave institution through the partially clad infant. By extension, narrative depictions of Mose and Pete in a similar single garment could have similarly suggested indecency produced by parsimonious owners – all of which would have been inconsistent with the Shelby’s gentility and benevolence.

Stowe’s depictions of Mose and Pete dispel notions of poorly-fed slave children. Before traveling South with Haley, Tom’s and his family dine on chicken, corn-cake, goodies from “certain mysterious jars” from the mantle-piece, and preserves. The meal, compounded by Chloe’s unfettered access to the Shelby plantation stores, implies plentiful food for the slave family, particularly the children. As Mose and Pete consume the farewell breakfast with childhood heartiness, they continue “benevolent slavery”

dialectics. Mose exclaims, “Lor, Pete ... han’t we got a buster of a breakfast!” (*UTC* 83). Implicit in Mose’s remark, “breakfast,” is childhood meals in slavery with regularity.

Earlier in the novel, dinner provides another example of plentiful food for Tom’s family. But in creating this mealtime scene, the narrative resumes digressive depictions of black children while enforcing social hierarchy. Emphatically incorporating Shelby’s imperatives and by further derogatory racial extension, Chloe, orders her sons away from the kitchen area. She demands, “Here you, Mose and Pete! get out de way, you niggers!” (*UTC* 19). Chloe addresses her sons as though she were shooin’ away puppies. They must wait hungrily as she prepares sausages, corncakes, and molasses for the family dinner, but permits the white child, George to eat first. The second introduction of African American children in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reduces them from exotic beauties to two hungry “wooly-heads, glistening black eyes, and fat, shining cheeks ... in the corner” of the slave cabin (18).

Spatial arrangements among the characters further determine social hierarchy. Young George Shelby seated at Chloe’s table assumes a position of superiority to the black Mose and Pete huddled in a corner. It is a narrative reenactment of the elder Shelby’s and Haley’s superior positions to little Harry Harris in the plantation parlor. Aware of his rank, George reenacts his father’s patronization. After eating as much as he could, and as if he were addressing and teasing animals, George breaks off “liberal bits of food,” throws it and says, “Here, you Mose, Pete ... you want some don’t you?” After retrieving the food, Tom’s sons “... seemed rather to prefer eating their cakes as they

rolled about on the floor under the table” (UTC 22). Mose and Pete, feasting on George’s leftovers, are eating straight from the master’s plate. George, on the other hand, is feeding his pets.

By depicting the slave children as wooly headed, bright-eyed creatures who enjoy eating from the floor, the text undermines the very humanity that it is attempting to establish. Given that many cabin floors, like those of Douglass and Washington were either dirt or clay, Mose and Pete are not too far removed from feeding at the trough.

Poorly sheltered and poorly clothed slaves also complained about being underfed although they raised large quantities of food. “We raise de wheat, / Dey gib us de corn: / We bake de bread, / Dey gib us cruss; / We sif de meal, / Dey gib us de huss” Douglass *My Bondage* (195). Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Booker T. Washington provide empirical evidence that food was subjected to a stringent rationing system. On Douglass’s childhood plantation, for instance, the monthly food allowance was: “eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal” (*Narrative* 24). Fourteen-year-old Harriet Jacobs witnessed food rationing to adult slaves and children over twelve years of age<sup>10</sup> on the Flint plantation.

To supplement diets, theft was often necessary. Former slave, Richard Carruthers explains, “If [the plantation authority] didn’t provision you ‘nough , you just had to slip round and get a chicken ... That ain’t stealin’ is it? You has to keep right on workin’ in

---

<sup>10</sup> Jacobs documents slaves’ food allowance on the Flint plantation. “Three pounds of meat, a peck of corn, and perhaps a dozen herring were allowed to each man. Women received a pound and a half of meat, a peck of corn, and the same number of herring. Children over twelve years old had half the allowance of women” (225).

the field, if you ain't allowanced 'nough" (Yetman 53). Booker T. Washington, recalls his mother "cooking a chicken late at night, and awakening her children for the purpose of feeding them." Aware that his mother had "stolen" the fowl, Washington later writes that she was not a thief but a victim of slavery (*Up From Slavery* 3). Another rationale lies in the fact that slaves like chickens were chattel. Eating the stolen food was simply "transferring the master's property from one form into another" (Genovese 601). Late night clandestine feasts like that of Washington's childhood reveal desperate and dangerous measures slave parents undertook to feed their children.

Frederick Douglass narrates, in extended simile, a more typical mealtime experience for slave children. He writes,

Our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called *mush*. It was put into a large tray or trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush: some with oystershells, others with pieces of shingle, some with naked hands and none with spoons. (*Narrative* 39)

Because "the quantity [of food] was inflexible" children scrambled to eat as much as they could with whatever tools they had (Genovese 507). A former slave, Robert Shepherd of Kentucky, also ate childhood meals from a trough. He describes a scene that underscores the children's hunger-driven urgency. After the children had eaten for a minute or two, the contents of the trough would look like the mud which came from their dirty hands (Yetman 264-265). Other former slaves describe masters who were more humane (Yetman 124, 141, 192, 200). In another instance, an informant relates slave children

eating from a common bowl by taking turns using the same spoon. In this manner each child consumed about the same quantity of food (104). These historical accounts of nutrition contrast starkly with the dinner scene in Tom's cabin.

The mealtime scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* additionally reinforces feral imagery in the boys through violence and appends that violence to their mother. After the meal, Chloe kicks the rambunctious boys "in a general way" and gives them a "slap, which resounded very formidably" (UTC 22). Chloe warns, "Better mind yourselves, or I'll take you down a button-hole lower, when Mas'r George is gone! What meaning was couched under this terrible threat it is difficult to say; but certain it is that awful indistinctness seemed to produce very little impression on the young sinners addressed" (22).

Discipline molded slave children's survival in a world where every behavior and utterance was weighed against plantation authority and punishments. Discipline also prepared the children for inevitable plantation violence. Eugene Genovese writes, "No doubt a good dose of sadism and brutality went into the harsh discipline" of the slave family. It was a necessary evil because the children "had little margin for error." Slave parents "could not permit children to learn from their own mistakes" (510). Mistakes could endanger both the child's well-being and that of the greater slave community.

Yet for Mose and Pete, Chloe's violence "seemed only to knock out so much more laugh from them." The boys, unaffected by their mother's slap, integrate it into ongoing rough play, "as they ... tumbled over each other out of doors, where they fairly

screamed with merriment.” Later, the children return to the cabin roaring like bears.

Uncle Tom concludes that his sons are “so full of tickle ... they can’t behave themselves” (*UTC* 22). Arguably, the boys engaging in play “demonstrat[es] that slavery had not robbed them of a desire for pleasure” (Schwartz 130).

More importantly, the play represents the children’s “will to make a world for themselves even as they shoulder the burdens of enslavement” (Schwartz 130).

Throughout “An Evening in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” the children are engaged in play. After boxing Mose’s ear, Chloe demonstrates that “the majority [of slave parents] displayed much tenderness and kindness ... toward their children” (Genovese 510). Overriding the surface jollity and play is the manner in which Stowe undermines the innocence and vulnerability of the black children.

Lacking the finer “feelings” of the more privileged, Mose and Pete are indestructible Others – a depiction that invites and sanctions the abuse of black children with impunity. When they first appear in the text, the boys are wooly-headed, glistening eyes, and shining cheeks that “[lack] sense of direction and instruction” (Haywood 419). Secondly, as Mose and Pete, like puppies, wait for scraps of mealtime food, Chloe addresses her sons and assaults them as though they were uninvited pets. The boys appear not only seem insensitive to her painful assaults; they appear to enjoy the violence.

After the evening meal, Mose and Pete continue the performance motif by doubling as pranksters. Tom’s cabin serves as a religious meeting house for plantation

slaves, as he is the spiritual leader. We learn that the previous meeting availed mischief opportunities for his sons. As the seated Old Uncle Peter sang an old Methodist hymn, Mose pulled the legs out from under the old man's chair causing the hymnist to tumble to the floor. In the following dialogue, the boys recall their "shines"<sup>11</sup> in jocular form:

Mose: "Old Uncle Peter sung both de legs out of dat oldest cheer, last week"

Chloe: "Yo go long! I'll be bound you pulled 'em out; some o' your shines."

Mose: "Well, it'll stand, if it only keeps jam up agin de wall!"

Pete: ... "Den Uncle Peter mustn't sit in it, cause he al'ays hitches<sup>12</sup> when he gets a singing. He hitched pretty nigh across de room, t'other night."

Mose: "Good Lor! get him in [the chair], then ... and den he'd begin, 'Come aints and sinners, hear me tell,' and den down he'd go." (*UTC* 23).

Mose and Pete are the preacher's wickedly comic sons. In the verbal repartee, the narrative layers pun, metaphor, and prank into "singing the legs from under the chair." The text further synchronizes the hymn's lyrics<sup>13</sup> with Old Uncle Peter's action. As he sings the opening line, "Come saints and sinners, hear me tell" (*UTC* 23), the boys cause him to fall. Mose reenacts the catastrophe in celebratory mime and jest. When George

---

<sup>11</sup> "To play pranks [Slang, U. S.] *Webster*, 1913" (*Online Dictionary*).

<sup>12</sup> To "hitch" in this context means "to move or lift as if by a jerk into some position; ...to put (as by effort) into verse ... especially by way of exposure" (*OED*). For instance, "Pheoby Watson hitched her rocking chair forward before she spoke" (Hurston 3). Old Uncle Peter appears to be moving his chair forward slightly, probably in sync with the melody's tempo. "Come saints and sinners, hear me tell / The wonders of Immanuel / Who snatch'd me from a burning hell, / and brought my soul with him to dwell, / To dwell, in sweetest union" (*UTC* 23).



joins the boys in laughter, the three are momentarily social equals. They are bound within the hermeneutical circle of young boys who share a common appreciation for mischief.

Through Mose and Pete, the sinners, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* pokes fun at slave religion. As Mose reenacts Old Uncle Peter singing, the child simultaneously mocks the old man's nasal tones and religious fervor indicated by "hitching the chair." A private colloquy between the boys further reveals the "good book" as the butt of their jokes. "Mother's bar'ls is like dat ar widder's, Mas'r George was reading 'bout, in de good book – dey never fails," said Mose, aside to Pete. "I'm sure one 'on em caved in last week," said Pete, "and let 'em all down in de middle of de singin'; dat ar was failin', warnt it?" (*UTC* 24). The boys' pranks and representative<sup>14</sup> play illustrates disrespect for the slaves' religious practices. Subversively, the narrative minimizes slave religion to the practice of "chil'en."

In the real world of slaves, child play included games such as marbles, hide-and-seek, and hide-the-switch, pitching horseshoes, and variations on handball and stickball, and jumping rope (Genovese 505). Often their play would mimic the slave condition. "One child would play the auctioneer and pretend to sell the others to prospective buyers" (Genovese 506). Twentieth-century novelist Octavia Butler captures representative play in *Kindred*:

---

<sup>14</sup> King, Wilma. *Stolen Childhood*. p.48.

... we saw a group of slave children gathered around a tree stump. These were children of the field hands, children too young to be of much use in the fields themselves. Two of them were standing on the wide flat stump while others stood around watching ... 'Now here a likely wench,' called the boy on the stump. He gestured toward the girl who stood slightly behind him. 'She cook and wash and iron. Come here, gal. Let the folks see you.' He drew the girl up beside him. 'She young and strong,' he continued. 'She worth plenty money. Two hundred dollars. Who bid two hundred dollars?' The little girl turned to frown at him. 'I'm worth more than two hundred dollars, Sammy!' she protested. 'You sold Martha for five hundred dollars!' 'You shut your mouth, said the boy. 'You ain't supposed to say nothing. When Marse Tom bought Mama and me, we didn't say nothing' (99).

As the above passage reflects and as historian Wilma King concludes, "Role play provided opportunities [for enslaved children] to face anxieties associated with slavery; however, play was not a solution to any psychological problems caused by slavery" (48). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* refashions and reduces representative play to comic, cynical mimesis. Mose and Pete neither understand the religious import of the slaves' meeting nor the sincerity of worship. Their ridicule of and pranks on the worshippers convey the false notion that enslaved children were not inculcated into the greater slave spiritual world.

The novel structures "An Evening in Uncle Tom's Cabin" to introduce Tom's family and serve up comic relief as the readers wait in suspended anxiety for the slave chase to begin. Through comic intervention, Tom's sons deflate melodramatic anxieties with their tumbling, pranks, and jokes. Unlike little Harry whose performance illustrated child training and acquiescence to patriarchal authority, Mose and Pete perform at will. With black shiny faces, further masked with (black) molasses, they literally perform in blackface. Whereas Harry's performance is a matter of mimesis, Mose and Pete's wild,

unruly, and willful behavior is a matter of narrative fact. Their unrestrained childhood play completes the happy slave home.

Ain't Misbehavin',<sup>15</sup>

Fueling nineteenth-century pro-plantation mythology, the Shelby farm is just short of paradise for enslaved African Americans. Mythology begins with portrayures of benevolent patriarchy and Mr. Shelby, who was “disposed to easy indulgence of those around him, and there had never been a lack of anything which might contribute to the physical comfort of the negroes on his estate” (*UTC* 8). Tom’s well-housed, well-fed, properly clothed, and well-treated family symbolizes Shelby’s benevolence. More indicative is the owner’s tolerance of literacy and religion within the slave community. The chapter titled, “An Evening at Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (I, iv.) illustrates Stowe’s “propagat[ion] of the plantation myth [that] slavery is benign and desirable” (Bean, Hatch, and McNamara 78).

Pro-plantation genealogy reinforces pro-plantation mythology. From master to field slave, the first volume positions the Shelby family as the farm’s center of authority with familial bonds reaching into the slave community. Mrs. Shelby, having brought Eliza up from girlhood “as a petted and indulged favorite” slave (*UTC* 9), maintains pseudo maternal kinship. Eliza reciprocates filial ties by seeking Mrs. Shelby’s motherly assurances to quell her fears that Harry might be sold. The mistress, in comforting Eliza,

---

<sup>15</sup> Title of song recorded in 1929 by Fats Waller.

avows that she “would as soon have one of [her] own children sold” (9). Tom, on the other hand, has been Mr. Shelby’s faithful servant since boyhood. Both fidelity and service bind Tom and Chloe to the Shelbys as extended family. Bondage on the Shelby plantation lulls the reader into illusions of idyllic co-existence between master and slave.

Against this backdrop, Haley’s arrival and purchase of Tom and Harry shatter the pro-plantation imagery that Stowe has so carefully crafted. The transaction also ruptures the Shelby genealogy. Mr. Shelby loses a lifelong trusted companion, while Tom’s family loses a husband and father. Fearful of losing Harry, Eliza escapes with the child, and Mrs. Shelby loses a surrogate daughter. Mr. Shelby dismisses the slave sale with indifference. Like Haley, he is simply doing “what every one does every day,” participating in the sale and trade of human flesh (*UTC* 28). Haley’s arrival and purchase of Shelby’s slaves jolts the readers’ sensibilities from ideal patriarchy to the realities and consequences of slavery.

Within the pro-plantation schemata, Haley emerges as an entirely wicked villain whom Mrs. Shelby characterizes as a “low-bred” “creature” and a “profane,” “undisciplined” “wretch” (*UTC* 28). After learning the truth of his visit, she further disparages him as “a man of leather – a man alive to nothing but trade and profit, -- cool, and unhesitating, and unrelenting, as death and the grave” (30). The novel’s first page gives a clearer image of the speculator, “a man who, in appearance, contrasted forcibly with [Mr. Shelby], ... was stout and thick-set, with coarse common features, and a swaggering air of pretension, which marks a low man who is trying to elbow his way up

in the world” (1). Haley’s depiction represents a Southern creed too easily accepted, “the belief that the slave trader was a low boor” (Brown 46). He offends the Shelbys, the Southern aristocrats that they represent, as well as genteel readers.

Contextually, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* establishes the slave speculator as an offensive Other worthy of the most public and humiliating derision. Haley’s “callousness and tyranny” (Yellin 133), crude manners, vulgar language, and arrogant indecencies of low breeding further denigrate his persona and his profession. Representing the underside of nineteenth-century society, Haley embodies the reprehensible villain<sup>16</sup> whom readers desire to punish.

Stowe enlists the weakest and most vulnerable victims of slavery, black children, to punish the speculator. Their depictions, an impressionistic blend of black children and Gothic silhouettes, transform along sub-human terms into creatures that enjoy wild and unruly mischief. Armed with news of Eliza and Harry’s escape, the children quietly wait, anticipating Haley’s reaction. One child, hugging a supporting post, looks outward as if in anticipation of something. Metaphor and extended simile compare the children to “a dozen or so imps [who] were roosting, like so many crows, on the verandah railings.” As metaphorical “crows” the children are potential noisy nuisances. And within the connotative range of “imp,” the slave children are “little devils” en masse eagerly awaiting their mischief opportunity. In the illustration, “Young Niggers on the

---

<sup>16</sup> Literary critic John Herbert Nelson argues similarly “The novel is comprehensive in that it treats the whole matter of negro slavery by personifying the work. Doubtless Mrs. Stowe did not intend to personify anything.” Herbert offers Simon Legree as personification of the evil of slavery (75). Haley’s characterization and vocation function in similar to personify crude villainy.

Verandah,” the children lined up along the railing in various poses appear to be lazily congregating, loitering (fig. 6). Their countenances suggest shiftlessness over child labor of any kind. After draping the children in Gothic bestiality, the narrative diffuses the depictions with comedy; and in doing so, it simultaneously diminishes the children’s punitive agency.

Shelby’s enslaved children taunt Haley by way of “Negro peculiarities,” noisy commotion. As predicted, Haley reacts to the slave escape with fervent and fluent swearing (*UTC* 36). Instead of responding to Haley in mocking discourse, the children react with spontaneous gesticulations and verbal ejaculations. Their antics, informed by the minstrel stage, suggest that slave children are not just comical, they enact hilarity. In African-African parlance, “They act the fool.” Performing racial blackness, the boys and girls “whoop off together,” “tumble in a pile of immeasurable giggle,” “[kick] up their heels and [shout] to their full satisfaction” (36). To invoke Tom’s earlier conclusion, they are “so full of tickle they cain’t behave themselves.” In other words, they *crow* over Haley’s embarrassing loss.

These children, misbehaving at will, repeat Mose and Pete’s disorderly conduct. The illustration, “Haley and Nigger Boys” conveys notions that African’s “enhanced feelings” lead to wild and unruly behavior, a trait intrinsic to the black child’s nature,<sup>17</sup> and “the violence of joy ... characterizes the mirth of a thoughtless Negro” (J. F. Cooper qtd. in Boime 86). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* equips the Shelby slave children with minstrel

---

<sup>17</sup> Scholar C. Dean makes this assessment of nineteenth and twentieth-century lithographic images of black children (10).

madness to taunt Haley. While the Shelby home spatially and racially separates Haley from the slave children, the foreground captures the kids rolling and tumbling about comic mayhem. Haley appears to be driving off pests, but the children express no fear of the trader. The scene mimics the minstrel stage where blackfaced characters would unexpectedly erupt into wild, noisy, comic mayhem that interrupted, frustrated, and confounded their “high-brow” interlocutor. To the delight of audiences, the interlocutor could not control his wild group: he could not seat it into civility. Likewise, Haley cannot “whip” the slave kids into obedience. Audiences of minstrel shows loved the action. Readers, familiar with the stage antics, would have recognized the parallel.

The children, as black-faced performers, signify upon slavery and slave speculation. “Substituting for adults,” the slave boys and girls create “a comfortable, allegorical space in which issues [such as slavery and slave speculation] could be discussed” (Dean 12). This trend of signification begins earlier in the novel with Harry Harris whose performance exposed Haley as the symbol of cold, calculating, immoral slave speculation. The pranksters Mose and Pete simply whimper in the realization of their impending family separation. Andy, black Jake, wooly-headed Mandy, and the remaining Shelby slave children serve as punitive agents who publicly disparage Haley by assuming his offensive verbosity and retool it into its true nature, noise. They further employ antics to signify on his “sound and fury”<sup>18</sup> as comic drama.

---

<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare. *Macbeth*. V.v. 27-78.

The scene transforms black children along sub-human terms into dark creatures that enjoy wild and unruly mischief – depictions that usurp and negate their agency as slavery’s social commentators and slave trade’s punitive agents. Interestingly, these depictions follow a narrative trend that appeared as early as 1825. In John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn*, metaphorical tags such as “goblins,” “Old Nick’s own brood,” and “imps” were appended to slave children (118, 265, 309). Each of Kennedy’s “strange blending of metaphors ... insists on inhumanity and grotesqueness and hints at danger” (Yellin 56). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* resumes this strategy but dismisses danger with comedy. As a result, the Shelby children in revelry appear as a strange flock of creatures that “furnish the liveliest picture.” (Kennedy 310).<sup>19</sup> Such regressive depictions literally “pull the legs out from under the kids’ revelry or “cheer” (*UTC* 23).”<sup>20</sup>

Instead, black children, forever at play on an antebellum Shelby plantation, project the South as an archetypal “timeless” region that symbolizes and glorifies the “good life.”

The word *timeless* defines the relationship that would develop between the image of the South and *anomie* (or social instability) experienced by men and women of rural, eastern background who lived in cities or who moved out west. The South became symbolically their old home: the place where simplicity, happiness, and all things we have left behind, exist outside of time. What may have been left behind collectively may have been a rural past, but individually it is childhood. (Bean, Hatch, and McNamara 76)

---

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn* concludes with a scene which blends black children in a foot race with dogs “that by a kindred instinct entered tumultuously into the sport and kept up the confusion” (*Swallow Barn* 310).

<sup>20</sup> This is a pun on Mose and Pete’s prank.



Stowe's Northern audience included laborers who were trapped and dispossessed by industrialization. Long hours and low wages left these proletariat<sup>21</sup> workers with little time, resources, or energy for recreation. Carefree days of endless play were the stuff of memories and dreams. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* offered nineteenth-century readers an alternate reality in images of happy (albeit wicked and unruly) black children thriving under benevolent Shelby paternalism. These images would have been "appealing and comforting" (Toll 72) to readers caught in a rapidly changing America.

Simultaneously, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* invites nineteenth-century Northern readers to vicariously and anonymously participate in the carefree antics of black childhood. The novel, through the practice of reading, offered black childhood in the antebellum South as temporal time and space untainted and uncongested by industrialization. These depictions "omit much plantation truth and exaggerate freely certain attractive features of the old life [where] pickaninnies frolic, God is in heaven, and all is right with the world" (Brown 18). The South symbolized through playful Shelby's black children allayed Northern fears about competition with whites in expanding labor forces. The first half of the nineteenth century was "an era of economic expansion of steamboats, railroads, and factories; jobs were opening up for thousands of workers in the cities" (Nash 30). Northern workers were fearful that abolition of slavery would open antebellum floodgates, triggering mass immigration of African-American agrarian workers from the rural South into the industrial North, thereby displacing Northern workers with a large

---

<sup>21</sup> Wright, Richard. "The Myth of Sisyphus."

pool of low wage earners. Stowe's slave characters, living in blissful happiness, dispel this threat. Her depictions of pampered and petted slaves, always at play, suggested that they were better off than "the hireling poor of the Northern Manufacture" (Gross and Hardy 173). The slaves had little or no desire for freedom. Neither did they appear well-equipped for a competitive labor market. Thus Stowe's characterizations of slaves posed no threat to Northern labor forces.

In attempting to create non-threatening black slaves, the author goes to outrageous extremes. Not only does she depict black slaves who do not desire freedom, she endows these characters with shiftlessness and indolence. Stowe substitutes a work ethic with mayhem governed by unbridled emotions. The depictions imply that untrained, unsocialized black children are not too far removed from the heathenish African savage of the white imagination and justify the need for slavery's paternalism. Stowe's slavery (depicted by the Shelby plantation) then functions as a social tool that transforms black children's bestial nature into servitudinal civility.

From wooly-headed Mose and Pete to wild, unruly, imps and crows," black child images erode along this slope. They are children, but of a different human species. The novel does not engage with this argument, but rather illustrates the salient features of specious intellectualism from which the argument grows. Harry Harris in blackface becomes a referent for this assertion.

Shelby's enslaved children then double as "specimens" (*UTC* 41), or exemplars of the African savage and specimens of slavery's civilizing efforts. Based on physical traits

such as the hair and skin, nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific studies concluded that the Negro “is not of common origin with the Caucasian,” but a “separate species” (“Physical Character of the Negro” (231). The study’s conclusions, intended to dissuade nineteenth-century “philanthropy [from] seeking to elevate the Negro to the highest *status* of humanity,” argues on two principles. The first principle is most relevant to this research. Negro “wool” is not akin to white hair: it is not hair at all (231). Wool, not being a feature of civilized man’s physiology, can be attributed to a lesser species.

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* illustrates the “species” argument metaphorically and through blended imagery. Earlier in the text Mose and Pete roar like bears. Woolly-headed Mandy, who coiled up among jugs, has less intelligence than a black cat (*UTC* 36). Kids loitering on the verandah clap, whoop, and shout in concert with barking dogs. Andy informs Sam that “Mas’r wants Bill and Jerry geared up” (38). For a readerly moment, Bill and Jerry are understood to be slaves also, but clarity appears pages later when Mrs. Shelby instructs Sam and Andy to “be careful of the horses [Bill and Jerry]” (40). Because slaves were equated with animals, they were neither bestowed with honorifics such as Mr., Mrs. or Miss, nor “entitles” or surnames. Stowe’s naming pattern illustrates Frederick Douglass’s assertion that men and horses held “the same rank in the scale of being” (*Narrative* 54). So when Stowe employs the same naming strategy with male slaves as she does the Shelby horses, she reinforces one’s bestial kinship with the other.

Her bestial metaphors extend into slave children’s public derision of the oppressor and of slavery. As Andy, black Jake, woolly-headed Mandy, and the remaining unnamed

kids “duck and dodge” angry flashes of Haley’s riding whip (*UTC* 36), they appear as a flock of crows running out of reach of his weapon, being scattered about, but sustain no harm. Haley emerges from the fray as a “paper tiger” whose innocuous threats encourage rather than quell the revelry. His violence against black children evolves into comic swearing at noisy pests.

Historical accounts of slavery explain that “[s]lave children were not overtly aggressive, as they were routinely whipped by members of the owning slave community for not working and for disobeying arbitrary rules” (Schwartz 110). Frederick Douglass writes that during the first six months of his residence with Mr. Covey (the alleged slave breaker) scarcely a week passed without a whipping (*Narrative* 65). Douglass notes that his “offenses” were Covey’s excuses to inflict brutality. “It would astonish one ... to see with what wonderful ease a slaveholder can find things, [a mere look, word, or motion], of which to make occasion to whip a slave” (79). According to both paradigms, Shelby’s unruly slave children would have been whipped “for disrupting the plantation [and] for demonstrating insolence” (Schwartz (110), but Stowe dismisses insolence with comedy.

Noticeably absent within this scene and throughout Volume I is child labor. “Play” with Haley suggests that Shelby’s enslaved children were not subjected to labor, especially forced. In place of labor, the text reinforces the myth of slave shiftlessness. For instance, the *roosting* (my emphasis) kids are loitering, waiting for mischief. Earlier, woolly-headed Mandy has been sleeping (36). For these children time is leisure. Labor for the Shelby slave children is an occasional indulgence in wicked play.

Historical scholarship reveals a different relationship between black childhood and labor. Though black children were considered ready to labor in the fields when they reached eight or ten years of age, younger children performed tasks in the slave quarters. They “cleaned, cooked, washed clothes, and gathered wood.” Like the fictional Mose and Pete, “they often watched younger siblings.” Younger children also “fed chickens and gathered eggs ... they helped garden, the youngest among them scaring birds away from crops” (Schwartz 123). Former slave Jacob Branch recalls such a work history: “Us chillen start to work soon’s us could toddle. First us gather firewood. Iffen it freezin’ or hot us have to go to toughen us up. When us gets li’l bigger us tend de cattle and feed hosses and hogs. By time us good sprouts us pickin’ cotton and pullin’ cane” (Yetman 40). While some slave testimonies report masters who were more flexible with childhood labor (20, 26), other testimonies report masters who enforced childhood labor differently. Lizzie Williams describes a “terrible mean” Marse Ellis Nixon. According to Ms. Williams, “All the little niggers have to learn to work when dey little; get out and pull weeds. Dey never had no time to play” (316). Children were punished severely for not keeping up with the lead adult slave in the fields (145). Both mother and children picking cotton feared that one or the other must “take the lash” for having insufficient cotton weight (Weld 96). Instead of historical representations, the enslaved children of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are Stowe’s “elaborate symbols of comedy,” her use of “what may be termed a vulgar eclecticism ... [She] chooses what makes ‘good copy’; ...distorts as far

as desirable; [and] omits at pleasure” (Gaines, *The Southern Plantation*, 202, 205). None of the black children on the Shelby plantation works. All of them play.

From wild and unruly creatures at play, the novel narrows scope and shifts perspective to Black Sam, whose characterizations are meant to “stress the slaves’ ‘peculiarities’ and ‘comicalities’” (Toll 34).<sup>22</sup> These traits reflect a literary “tradition [which] insists that the plantation black is intrinsically a clown” whose “attire must be mirth-provoking ... [He] must be presented as essentially absurd” (Gaines 198-199). Superficially, Sam embodies the clown with exaggerated blackness, facial expressions, gestures, and costuming. Three shades blacker than any male on the Shelby plantation, Sam rolls his eyes, scratches his “woolly pate,” and hoists his pantaloons in comic gestures of intellectual thought (*UTC* 38). A long nail “in the place of a missing suspender-button” punctuates the slave’s comic costuming. His language, “fraught with tortured syntax and strained malapropisms” (Yarborough 47), completes the caricature. Sam models what “may be easily recognized as spectacular symbolism ... primordial expressiveness in [gestures,] dress, [and language] are transmuted in the tradition into elaborate symbols of comedy” (Gaines 206).

Historian Forrest Wilson argues that Stowe sketched Sam from a real-life model named Jackson. Accordingly, Jackson was a Cincinnati barber whose “white Creole wife dressed him in female attire” and smuggled him North. Cross-dressed, Jackson posed as his wife’s personal maid. While in the North, he was employed by Dr. Beecher then

---

<sup>22</sup> While Toll’s observations refer to the black-faced minstrel, the same observations could be made of Stowe’s depictions of Sam and Andy.

disappeared for two years, presumably in prison (270). Presuming that the alleged Jackson was Stowe's model for Sam, the author forfeited his authenticity to caricature.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Sam's initial narrative function is twofold: he is both a politician and a subversive abolitionist mouthpiece. News of Tom's sale, for example, prompts the slave to muse in philosophical soliloquy, "It's an ill wind dat blows nowhar" (*UTC* 37). His expression "double-voices" in that both proverb<sup>23</sup> and the slave's malapropism express truths. Implicit in the proverb is Sam's potential benefit from Tom's sale. His occupation of Tom's vacant position means upward social movement within the slave society. Inherent in the malapropism, however, is "the great and unredressed injustice of slavery" (388): slavery has no future in the Union. As Sam voices his political agenda, his twist of language subversively iterates the novel's political agenda. Alone to reflect on himself and his world, Sam concerns himself not with being enslaved, but with his enslaved position in relationship to his master.

Sam's realization that he must not capture Eliza and Harry prompts more philosophy. "Der ain't no sayin'"<sup>24</sup>—never 'bout no kind o' thing in *dis yer world*" (*UTC* 38). This latter remark conjures slave spirituals sung during Tom's religious meeting, "I Am Bound for the Promised Land" and "O Canaan, Sweet Canaan" (25). The lyrics indicate a heaven-bound journey, but their coded messages allude to the world of

---

<sup>23</sup> Heywood, John. "An yll wynde that blowth no man to good, men say." *A dialogue conteinyny the nonber in Effect of All the prouerbes in the English tongue*. 1546.

<sup>24</sup> Sam voices a Southern idiom that is also expressed in the Black vernacular as "There ain't no tellin'." The implied meaning is that there the situation is difficult to discern. There is no way of knowing. When Sam explains, "Dar ain't no sayin' ... gals is peculiar; they never does nothin' ye thinks they will; mose gen'lly the contrar," the meaning is clearer (*UTC* 50).

freedom in the North. Frederick Douglass writes, “A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of ‘O Canaan, sweet Canaan / I am bound for the land of Canaan’ something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the North – and the North was our Canaan” (Douglass, *My Bondage* 150).

Sam’s desire to please Mrs. Shelby motivates his eagerness to help Eliza escape. Blinded by ambitious servitude, he interprets the spiritual literally. He appears oblivious to the nature of true freedom from slavery. To him it is an abstraction, the thing of another world. It results in his expressed confusion about Eliza’s escape and the temporal nature of freedom. He personifies the ignorant, contented slave who “has no conception of liberty” (Takaki 33). As an abolitionist tool, his characterization diffuses the Northern fear that the end of slavery would trigger mass black migration from the South.

A colloquy between Sam and Mrs. Shelby illustrates the role of language in his evolving character construction. Playing the role of humble supplicant, his responses to Mrs. Shelby turn on variations of the utterance “Lord.” He incorporates apostrophe: “O, Lord;” benediction: “Lord bless you”; and interjection: “O, Lord!” despite Mrs. Shelby’s reproaches. Sam seemingly trips over the “unscriptural” blurts in spite of his comedic attempts to the contrary (*UTC* 39). The exchange between Sam and Mrs. Shelby and Sam doubles as minstrel play between end-man and interlocutor respectively. Sarah Meer explains:



Mrs. Shelby takes on the interlocutor role, ordering, teaching [reprimanding], and reforming, and Sam becomes the end-man, disrupting, mocking, and blaspheming Mrs. Shelby, as interlocutor, instructs Sam in correct linguistic practice and demands reverent comportment. Persistently transgressing, Sam achieves the end-man's dance between ignorance and mockery in his counterproductive attempts to stop blaspheming. He conceals a hint of cheek in a hopeless attempt to conform. (Meer 140)

In discourse with Mrs. Shelby, Sam's clown image evolves into an absurd composite of exaggerated humility and stagnant intellect. At the root of Sam's character is the Sambo figure or plantation fool, a "happy-go-lucky," "empty-headed," "grinning darkie" devoted to his master (Toll 73). Sam personifies a characterization that both Northern and Southern whites knew they were not and did not want to become (Takaki 43).

Sam and his sidekick, Andy, function as a trickster team to forestall Haley's search. Although technically they are young men, their characterizations suggests that they are little more than teens (Yarborough 47). An 1897 print titled, "Sam and Andy Laughed to Their Hearts' Content" illustrates Yarborough's conception of the pair. Enlisted to assist Haley, Sam and Andy employ wit and guile to sabotage his efforts. Their oneness implicit across the phonemic range of their combined names assimilates into Samandandy. The two are Stowe's Brer Rabbit.

Traditionally, Brer Rabbit, the product of African-American humor and folklore, is a singular animal figure who outwits his stronger foe through charm and deceit. His character, central to the *Uncle Remus* collection of tales,<sup>25</sup> demonstrates how "the strong

---

<sup>25</sup> Joel Chandler Harris collected African-American animal tales from slaves and published them in seven volumes. Three additional volumes were published posthumously. Many of his stories featured Brer

[who] attempt to trap the weak ... are tricked by them instead" (Levine 106). In ante-bellum culture, the animal character is a substitute for the slave. Sam and Andy function within the "slave-as-trickster, trickster-as-slave thesis" (118) to offset Haley's bloated sense of importance and to undermine his efforts.

The Bre'r Rabbit team manipulates Haley unawares and transforms the Shelby plantation from playground into circus. We are told that Sam secretly wedges a sharp nut between the speculator's saddle and horse to stall Haley. When Haley attempts to mount, the horse throws him and runs away. Sam capitalizes on opportunity and startles yet another horse into running, while Andy gently coaxes the remaining horse to join the others. In the confusion that ensued, Sam and Andy "ran and shouted [in feigned attempts to catch horses that they intentionally allowed to run away] --dogs barked here and there,--and Mike, Mose, Mandy, Fanny, and all the smaller specimens on the place, both male and female, raced, clapped hands, whooped, and shouted, with outrageous officiousness and untiring zeal" (*UTC* 41). The pair's chase for runaway horses foreshadows the comic mayhem that will accompany Haley's futile chase for the runaway slaves. Meanwhile the children noisily display the absurdity of both efforts.

Sam, as the minstrel end-man, is Haley's comic antagonist. Haley, on the other hand, is the minstrel interlocutor who falls prey to his own devices. On the minstrel stage, the end-man represented the "plantation nigger" or low culture, and the

---

Rabbit, the wily trickster. In African-American tales Brer Rabbit was transmuted from his animal to human form. "To this day much less is known about the slaves' human trickster cycle than about their animal trickster stories (Levine 83, 125).

“interlocutor served as a bogus mouthpiece for high culture. The goal of the end-man was to put down the interlocutor” (Bean 72). Because of the black-faced minstrel shows’ national popularity, nineteenth-century readers of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* have been familiar with both interlocutor and end-man. Haley takes the social high ground disparaging Sam and Andy as “chaff” or garbage. As end-men, Sam insults Haley with indirection while Andy signifies upon Sam’s effectiveness.

For instance, Sam toys with Haley’s intellectual “superiority” and distrust of slaves. When queried about dogs for tracking slaves, Sam, with a look of “earnest and desperate simplicity,” explains to Haley, “Our dogs all smells round considerable sharp” and summons the plantation pet Bruno, a lumbering Newfoundland, to complete the joke. Outdone, Haley responds, “You go hang!” The slave surreptitiously tickles Andy to mark the joke, and Andy signifies with a “split out into a laugh” (*UTC* 49). Sam and Andy, as minstrel end-men, keep Haley, the interlocutor, “in a constant state of commotion” (51) as they “supplant conflict with the ludicrous and nonsensical” (Meer 140).

In the spirit of “puttin’ on ol’ massa,” the slave attempts to slow Haley’s progress. Black Sam doubles as the prodigious fool and the “sly black character” who uses “deception and guile to outsmart [Haley]” (Toll 73). He pelts the speculator with complaint of road conditions that “were bad for Jerry’s (the horse’s) foot.” Sam confuses Haley with false sightings of Eliza and frustrates him with inconsistent traveling speeds. Sam’s tricks confirm Haley’s perception of him as a “cussed liar.” Andy’s laughter

further confirms the perception. His laughter, signification on the pair's inside joke, reflects actual slave behavior.

They always appeared to be laughing among themselves. Singing and dancing made sense to whites, who could interpret this behavior in terms of tribal customs and primitive rites. Laughter, however, demanded a different or at least a wider interpretation ... It was the laugh, the raucous laugh, and the energy that propelled it, that most jolted whites. Of all the slaves' characteristics, this appears to have been the most perplexing – and extremely grating. (Boskin 53)

Laughter masked ridicule. It incorporated the unspoken reversal of roles that “lowered the most dignified subjects into ludicrous lights and elevated the most trivial into importance” (John Bernard qtd. in Levine 301). Laughter was also a form of signification in which “the venerated were vanquished or at least made to look foolish by the lowly” (Levine 301). In the vein of Bre'r Rabbit, slave laughter meant that members of the owing class were the unsuspecting target of jokes or trickery. It “allowed slaves to openly ridicule and express contempt for whites” (302). White's inability to interpret the merriment increased the force of humor. Sam and Andy model this behavior with giggles and laughs in the search for Eliza and Harry. Haley's flashes of the riding whip signal frustration with his inability to fathom the source of the teen's humor.

Haley's subsequent realization that he has been duped by the pair confirms the overseer's conclusions about slave mischief. It is simply a matter of slave “rascality.”<sup>26</sup> Haley, coming into the full realization that he has been repeatedly outsmarted, sums Sam

---

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Samuel W. Cartwright explains that the disease manifests in slave's destruction, waste, or damage of property. While Cartwright alleges that this disease is found mostly in free blacks, he also describes its symptoms among slaves (333).

up as “You rascal!” (*UTC* 51). Conversely, Sam and Andy, on the other hand, reveal Haley as the incompetent fool, and Haley finally interprets their raucous laughter correctly.

Depicted as a happy-go lucky clown, a black-faced minstrel, a buffoon, and a trickster, Sam evolves into a Sambo figure. He buffoons the incorrigible sinner, mimics the intellectual in combined malapropisms and heavy dialect, and burlesques the political “stump speech.” With Andy’s assistance, he entertains Mrs. Shelby and the verandah children with pranks targeted at Haley. Both teens playfully torment the speculator and privately deem him the butt of their unvoiced joke. The two also play games with each other by sharing winks, tickle, laughs, and pokes to signify their mischief. Yet at the root of Sam’s character is the ignorant darkie figure who is “at once both the instigator and the butt of humor” and “a figure whose role as a humorist was central to the theater of racism (Boskin 63, 54).

Just as Sam artfully hijacks Haley’s capture of Eliza, Stowe hijacks the subversive authority with which she has empowered the slave. Stowe creates in Sam a clever slave whose skills outwit Haley, but she also offers up Sam as the loyal slave by guided by a desire to please Mrs. Shelby. Rather than exploit circumstances to gain personal freedom, Sam is the burlesque politician who seeks to improve his enslaved position on her plantation. Though Sam and Andy are in close proximity to the Ohio River, neither expresses a personal desire for freedom. Sam, in fact, is unsure about the nature of freedom.

He celebrates Eliza's escape for the wrong reasons. His rebellions are directed at Haley, an instrument of the institution, not at the slave institution itself. He is misguided by ambition and loyalty. Politically, Sam assumes that his role in Eliza's escape will curry political favor and improve his chances of moving into Tom's now vacant position. Meanwhile, his actions elevate him to celebrity status within the slave community. Sam was skilled at "making capital out of everything that turned up, to be invested for his own especial praise and glory" (*UTC* 64). His celebration reflects a narcissistic slave whose designs on upward mobility are realized by adjusting the yoke of bondage.

Sam and Andy, happy teenage slaves, loyal to their master, symbolized controlled and contented slaves. Their depictions were in direct opposition to another slave stereotype, the dangerous slave and his/her potential for slave rebellion. The conduct of Sam, Andy, and the remaining slave children of Volume I reinforces a mythic world of eternal childhood play and reassures nineteenth-century white readers that the Negro will voluntarily remain in paternal bliss. But as the novel continues in Volume II, a dark side of these characterizations emerges and collapses into a little black child named Topsy.

### Topsy: *Something* Wicked

Topsy, who appears in Volume II, reigns most infamously atop the cast of black children in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Fragments of her characterization, diffused through the black children in Volume I, anticipate her arrival later in the novel. These fragments begin to coalesce with Topsy's introduction; and when she does appear, her character

rings with a certain familiarity. She mimes Harry's performance, repeats Mose and Pete's wicked pranks, and, like Sam, stages silent rebellions. Topsy, "chiefly a product of the minstrel show" (Lhamon Jr. 143), is the novel's clownish proposition for an enslaved black child. But unlike the others, Topsy is Stowe's "specimen" or exemplar of demonic force.

With Topsy, Stowe grants readers license to "whip" black children, even scar them, and to do so with impunity. Conversely, the thrust of Stowe's abolitionist message rests on condemnation of beating slave adults, particularly the bloody homicidal beatings of Prue and Tom. Nevertheless, Stowe sanctions and encourages abuse through a black character's voice and through the victim's own words. Through the novel's characterization and treatment of black children, Stowe's message on black child abuse is, at best, conflicted.

Topsy is a "little negro girl, about eight or nine years of age," who in market language, is St. Clare's "something," a specimen of the Negro race (206) that he has purchased for Ophelia to educate and train. With Topsy, St. Clair challenges Ophelia to repeat the instruction and care that she had given him as a child (136). Having noticed Ophelia's haughty bigotry, St. Clare pulls the child along and displays her to Ophelia much as would the proud child owner of a new exotic reptile. Packaged in jet-black demonic imagery, the child's beady eyes, white and brilliant teeth, woolly hair, a face of shrewdness and cunning, and filthy ragged garment made of bags reduce her into a young, "goblin-like," "heathenish" creature. Ophelia confirms this construction through

shock, repulsion, and query. “Augustine, she asks, “what in the world have you brought that *thing* here for?” (emphasis mine, 206-207). Topsy’s purchase serves several functions in the St. Clare villa. First, she is the referent for each of three positions on slavery held by the white adults: Ophelia, who maintains a principled distance from slavery; Marie St. Clare, who is hardened and spoiled slavery advocate; and Augustine St. Clare, who regards slavery with passive resistance.

Ophelia asserts Christian belief in a common humanity and spirituality among slaves and slave owners. All possess immortal souls. Upon hearing of Prue’s murder, Ophelia concludes that slavery is “An abominable business, -- perfectly horrible” (*UTC* 191) and reminds Augustine that all men must “stand before the bar of God” in judgment (153). Augustine St. Clare acknowledges “a diamond of truth” in Ophelia’s position, but rebukes her pious concerns by exposing her religious hypocrisy. Having observed Ophelia recoil as Eva embraced Mammy, St. Clare charges his cousin with professing but not practicing her religious tenets. He reminds her, “You loathe [slaves] as you would a snake or a toad, yet you are indignant at their wrongs. You would not have them abused, but you don’t want to have anything to do with them yourselves. You would send them to Africa, out of your sight and smell ...” (154). Topsy will test Ophelia’s advocacy for the education and reasonable treatment of slaves as well as Ophelia’s self-righteousness.

Marie St. Clare, Augustine’s narcissistic wife, views slaves in bitter contempt. To her, they are “stupid, carefree, unreasonable children” a “childish ungrateful set of wretches” who worsen rather than improve. More pointedly, they are creatures



impossible to get along with, some of whom cannot be changed “by any amount of severity” (*UTC* 150, 202, 203). Topsy symbolizes the slave whom Marie considers must be brutalized into servitudinal civility.

Augustine St. Clare’s attitude towards slavery and his behavior towards his slaves model civil disobedience. Having inherited slaves from his father, St. Clare refuses to rule them with brutality, and sums up other slave owners as “low-minded, brutal,” “irresponsible despots” (*UTC* 191). As a redemptive measure for his participation in the institution, St. Clare uses slaves “to help spend money” rather than exploit them as “money-making tools.” He does not free his slaves, arguing that “they all were satisfied to be as they were” (201). Topsy will disrupt the routine complacency that the St. Clare household has established.

For Augustine, Topsy’s exoticism is a fascinating diversion to his ennui. He “took the same kind of amusement in [her] that a man might in the tricks of a parrot or a pointer” (*UTC* 218). Like the new parrot or dog, Topsy’s ability to entertain brings a fresh vitality to the St. Clare home. Reiterating Shelby’s orders to little Harry, St. Clare

giving a whistle, as a man who would call the attention of a dog, orders Topsy to perform, ‘give us a song, now, and show us some of your dancing.’ the black, glassy eyes glittered with a kind of wicked drollery, and the thing struck up, in a clear shrill voice, and odd negro melody, to which she kept the time with her hands and feet spinning round, clapping her hands, knocking her knees together, in a wild, fantastic sort of time, and producing in her throat all those guttural sounds which distinguish the native music of her race; and finally, turning a summerset or two, and giving a prolonged closing note, as odd and unearthly as that of a steam-whistle. (207)

Her whistling borrows what cultural historian W. T. Lhamon Jr., identifies as a staple feature of minstrelsy, the Billy Whitlock imitation of locomotive whistles.<sup>27</sup> In blackface, Whitlock would imitate the train whistle, burlesque a train conductor, and perform “a rapid sequence of disjointed and ... unusual contexts (courting, a ball, the zoo).” Lhamon Jr. explains that Whitlock’s audiences found these “fantasy trips” to be comical and asserts that Topsy’s version of the locomotive exceeded that of the professional (97).

The child’s mimesis of the Whitlock locomotive begins with glittering eyes/metaphoric engine lights. Her train “pulls behind” the following sequence of disjointed actions: an unusual song (“an odd negro melody”), “wild” dancing (spinning, hand-clapping, knee-knocking), tempo (“odd guttural sounds”), and acrobatics (“a sommerset or two”). The “train” sequences close with a “prolonged” “steam-whistle,” and Topsy landing “suddenly ... on the carpet.” She signals the finale with folded hands and a look that wafts between “meekness” and “cunning” (*UTC* 207). Topsy’s singularly wild performance replicates Whitlock’s blackface burlesque on the locomotive express and the disjointed comicalities that it has in tow.

From the minstrel show, Stowe also borrows the end-man’s unpredictable wild, unruly, features and refashions them to package her wayward slave child. Lhamon Jr. argues that such signs as

---

<sup>27</sup> Billy Whitlock popularized the locomotive whistle during minstrel shows in the 1830s and 1840s. His imitation of the locomotive whistle accompanied a lecture involving unrelated people, places, and scenes, i.e. “visit to wild animals, to a ball, etc” (Lhamon Jr. Jr. 93).

Topsy's steam-whistle imitation, 'wild,' syncopated time,' and body-warping ... would have pointed contemporary readers to Topsy as a wench figure from the minstrel show. What clinches [the sequences] all together is Topsy's askance glances. [They] flag her recalcitrance even when Stowe sanctimoniously sits her down on the carpet. (Lhamon Jr. 142)

Through the character of Ophelia, Stowe will repeatedly attempt to "seat" or civilize heathenish Topsy.

When the collective minstrel imagery of Topsy's predecessors collapses into her character, she at once emerges as a curious loathsome *thing* and a captivating performer. Topsy embodies "a complex dialectic that condensed opposing emotions of fascination and dread, acceptance and rejection of blackness within the performing black body" (Cassuto qtd. in Morgan 41). St. Clare's fascination with the child echoes Whitlock's audiences and Haley's delight with Harry's "comical, musical concern[s]." Unlike Haley's market-driven ambitions for Harry, St. Clare's purchase of Topsy is motivated by humanitarianism as well as amusement.

In an allusion to Prue, St. Clare professes that he could not purchase "every poor wretch" that he sees, yet he purchases Topsy to save the child from brutalizing owners. St. Clare, having argued for slaves' humanity, purchases Topsy as a measure of redemption for his participation in the institution. He also recognizes the child's shrewdness and cunning, suspecting that she will challenge Ophelia's rigid principles. Twice, in Ophelia's presence, he seeks Topsy's reassurances that she will behave herself, but privately he muses otherwise. The slave child responding "Yes Mas'r" with

“sanctimonious gravity,” “folded hands,” and twinkling eyes is keenly aware of St. Clare’s mischief. Yes, she will behave: yes, she will misbehave.

Her performance, like Harry’s, demonstrates Stowe’s ability to capture minstrelsy’s song and dance and transmute those traits into her literary characters. She does so in much the same manner that minstrelsy attempted to capture black culture and transform it into theatrics. Both attempts are problematic in that minstrel representations of blacks and black culture were counterfeit exaggerations. Yet these fraudulent stage figures and their shows achieved a popularity that transcended the theater and spread into street and parlor conversations. Cultural historian Sarah Meer notes that “Stowe herself almost certainly never saw a minstrel show. She famously disapproved of the theater” (132). Nevertheless, blackface minstrelsy’s national popularity and cultural saturation would have acquainted Mrs. Stowe with the tradition’s most salient features.

Thus, the child’s exaggerated blackness, much like her song and dance, is heavily infused with elements of nineteenth-century minstrelsy. Set against her blackest black (burnt cork) complexion, Topsy’s eyes shine like glass beads, her “half-opened mouth” displays “brilliant white teeth.” Instead of hair, she has wool -- braided into disordered “little tails” (*UTC* 206). Twice removed from a contrived reality, Topsy’s characterization makes excellent “copy.”

Her performance paralyzes Ophelia with amazement (*UTC* 207), but the child’s blackness fills her with loathing. St. Clare, enjoying the reaction, represents Topsy as a “fresh-caught specimen” (207-208) upon which Ophelia can test her Northern hypothesis

of Christian goodness. Ophelia fails the test before it begins. She approaches her project, Topsy as “a person might be supposed to approach a black spider” (208).<sup>28</sup> It is a moment of revelation. Ophelia exclaims,

Now Augustine ... Your house is so full of these little plagues, now, that a body can't set down their foot without treading on 'em. I get up in the morning, and find one asleep behind the door, and see one black head poking out from under the table, and lying on the door-mat, -- and they are mopping and mowing and grinning between all the railings, and tumbling over the kitchen floor! (207)

The notion of having to educate the unsightly Topsy unlocks the pious Ophelia's own bigotry as she castigates her cousin. Ophelia speaks of the children as though they were stray pets, invading pests, or worse plagues, which evoke the Biblical imagery and prophesy of devouring locusts.<sup>29</sup> She rejects Topsy as she rejects blackness.

---

<sup>28</sup> Stowe's spider metaphor here is loaded with connotations of evil, danger, and reprehensible insignificance, illustrating Ophelia's repulsion to the slave child. It echoes a passage in Jonathan Edwards's 1741 sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," that reads "The God that holds you over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire" (Lauter 592).

<sup>29</sup> Exod. 10:4-6, "Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast:

And they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field:

And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day" (*Bible: New International Version*).

Topsy's characterization is the epitome of "sooty little urchin[s]," "little dirty things," "little dirty babies" (143, 147, 151), and a composite of the black children in Volume I of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She mimes Harry's buffoonery and minstrelsy. Like Mose and Pete, Topsy has beady eyes and wooly hair. Her blackness moves her closer in "goblin-like" appearance to the "imps" on the veranda. Stowe collapses all of the negative traits of the aforementioned children into Topsy and interweaves these traits with Gothic imagery. Stowe stops short of calling Topsy a devil. Instead she refers to the child in lyrical assonance as "some sooty gnome from the land of Diablerie"<sup>30</sup> (209). Topsy's collective image fulfills the notion that nineteenth-century black children are wild, full of antics, wicked, and like the spider threatening, perhaps evil. Ophelia's successful "training" of Topsy becomes a humanitarian model, which reluctantly anticipates abolitionism. Though Topsy becomes a crucible upon which Ophelia can attempt a missionary conversion of the wild and wicked heathen, the child will also test Ophelia's religious character.

Ophelia begins Topsy's training with interrogation. In the following oft-cited dialogue between the two, several narrative strategies are at play: genealogical construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of Otherness, end-man/interlocutor interplay, allusions to slave breeding and its consequences, and Lockean tabula rasa theory.

---

<sup>30</sup> "Hell. Diablerie is witchcraft, devilry, or wickedness." (Stowe, *UTC* 209).

‘How old are you Topsy?’

‘Dun no, Missis,’ said the *image* (my emphasis) with a grin that showed all of her teeth.

‘Don’t know how old you are? Didn’t anybody ever tell you? Who was your mother?’

‘Never had none!!’ said the child, with another grin.

‘Never had any mother? What do you mean? Where were you born?’

‘Never was born!’ persisted Topsy, with another grin, that looked so goblin-like that if Miss Ophelia had been at all nervous, she might have fancied that she had got hold of some sooty gnome from the land of Diablerie. (UTC 209)

The colloquy between Ophelia and Topsy resonates the slave narrative genre in its attempt to establish genealogy. The opening pages of the slave narrative, for example, relate the former slave’s place of birth and sketchy parentage (Olney 50).<sup>31</sup> Ophelia cannot establish Topsy’s basic genealogical foundations, age and parentage. The child’s absent genealogy scaffolds her otherness while hinting at otherworldliness.

So, as Ophelia attempts to transform the *thing* into the child, Stowe subverts this process through Gothicism. Topsy’s transformation from a filthy heathenish *thing* into a “Christian-like” specimen begins with a bath and “suit of clothes” (UTC 207). Ophelia also shears off all of Topsy’s braids and in doing so, transforms the child into an androgynous creature. Seated before Ophelia, the child is a black grinning *image*

---

<sup>31</sup> Chapter One of Frederick Douglass’s narrative begins, “I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough ... I have no accurate knowledge of my age ... My mother was named Harriet Bailey ... My father was a white man ... I never saw my mother, to know her as such, more than four or five times in my life” (Narrative 18-18).

(emphasis mine). Though Topsy has no sense of history, imagism perversely confirms Ophelia's musings. Her Christian gaze restructures Topsy's "image" into a "sooty gnome" born of Hell. The hellish Other casts an indecipherable black grin back at Ophelia.

Topsy's interview is deliciously flavored with minstrel end-man/interlocutor conventions. Her antics were staples in blackface entertainment (Meer 132). As end-man, Topsy symbolizes low culture and a high energy that frequently manifested in disruptions, disorder, and general chaos. Her end-man goal is to disrupt or confound the interlocutor, Ophelia, and expose her as a bogus representative of order and "respectability" (147). So as the sooty gnome from Hell "gives Ophelia hell," readers of the novel would have been familiar with the child by virtue of her theatrical typology.

Topsy's grin indicates that behind the end-man mask, she mischievously taunts the interlocutor/Ophelia. In verbal play between interlocutor/Ophelia and end-man/Topsy, Meer explains that "[e]ach of the lines between [the two characters] is "arrested by the necessity to rephrase or reexplain" what is meant (Meer 148). Ophelia's rephrased question results in Topsy's rephrased answer, punctuated with a grin. And the child's insistence that she [Topsy], "[n]ever was born" is a denial of her own humanity, reaffirming that like demons, she was made. The child's response is an affront to reason and to the interrogator (149), but it resonates with Augustine St. Clare's conclusion that slavery has turned the enslaved black over to the devil, for [white] benefit, "in this world." "Cunning and deception" he explains, are simply by-products of the same



institution which also perpetuates “ignorance, brutality, and vice” (*UTC* 185, 201).

Topsy is a product of slavocracy: slavery made her into the wicked creature that she is.

When the child gives a sincere explanation of absent genealogy, she explains “[N]ever had no father nor mother, nor nuthin’. I was raised by a speculator, with lots of others. Old Aunt Sue used to take care on us” adding, “Laws, Missis, there’s heaps of ‘em. Speculators buys ‘em up cheap when they’s little and gets ‘em raised for market” (*UTC* 209- 210). Her explanation alludes to slave breeding, a wicked form of animal husbandry designed to increase slave labor forces, thus giving the practice a “moral resonance” and reflecting the slave owner’s indifference to black child humanity (Meer 150). When Topsy speaks of her short history in market language, she resumes Prue’s history as a slave breeder.

Stowe enacts this indifference earlier in the novel with Haley aboard the *La Belle Riviere*. Among Haley’s charges is a slave mother with a ten-month-old infant. Haley boasts to a stranger/customer (who incidentally “has a good place for raisin’ [slave children]” and is considering “more stock”) that the child is “straight, fat, strong; flesh hard as a brick!” “Black infants,” Haley concludes, “are “raised as easy as any kind of critter there is going; they ain’t a bit more trouble than pups.” While the mother sleeps, he steals the child and sells it to the stranger for forty-five dollars (*UTC* 111-112). In this singular transaction, Haley’s erases the infant’s genealogy. Similarly, the sale authenticates Topsy’s belief that no one made her: she just grew (210). Both Topsy’s

assertion and the anecdotal transaction give rise to the myth “the Negro is without a past” (Herskovits 298).

Having witnessed the colloquy between Topsy and Ophelia, St. Clare suggests to Ophelia that the child is simple-minded. Topsy’s ahistorical childhood strongly implies that her isolation from cultural and civilizing influences have left her an intellectual blank slate. Echoing John Locke’s theory that children were born with an empty mind or blank slate onto which life’s experiences were imprinted, St. Clare advises Ophelia, “You will find virgin soil there, Cousin; put in your own ideas, -- you won’t find many to pull up” (*UTC* 210). The narrative also aligns Topsy’s intellectual inferiority with racial caste so that the “darkie grin” plastered over her heathenish countenance implies complacent stupidity.

But the child’s propensity for verbal play as a survival stratagem masks “shrewdness and cunning.” She has stolen a ribbon and pair of gloves and secreted the stash in her sleeves. Once the ribbon theft is exposed, Topsy launches a series of emphatic denials couched in comic ignorance and feigned surprise, “Laws! why that ar’s Miss Feely’s ribbon, an’t it? How could it get caught in my sleeve?” She continues to deny guilt with forswearing and appeals for Ophelia’s empathy. Topsy even shifts responsibility for the secreted ribbon to Ophelia who must have left it on the bed, “and so it got caught in the clothes, and so got caught in [the thief’s] sleeve” (*UTC* 212). Controlling both the colloquy and Ophelia, Topsy’s evasion of guilt mimics the end-man’s artful manipulation of the interlocutor.

Through double negation, Topsy reveals truth. When she says, “I never tells no lies,” she unintentionally admits guilt to the very deed. The confession, however, is strung to more lies. In addition to ribbon and gloves, she also admits to nonexistent crimes – the theft of Eva’s necklace and Rosa earrings. The child explains the invented transgressions in her attempt to satisfy Ophelia’s demand for a full confession. Like the end-man, Topsy confounds and frustrates Ophelia the interlocutor with clever logic. The child’s fanciful lying would have easily served as a survival stratagem. Citing Topsy’s initial wild and heathenish appearance as evidence, critic Josephine Donovan asserts that the behavior is consistent with being uncivilized. She explains that routine abuse has left Topsy with “no socialization, no education, and no love in her short life.” Having also been raised like an animal for future sale in the slave market, Topsy “[has] none of the concepts of civilized life” (Donovan 93). From this perspective, novelties such as ribbons and gloves may have induced the child to steal, but the theft would have incurred severe punishment from owners who brutalize on a whim. Stowe illustrates this brutality through the tavern owners from whom St. Clare rescues Topsy.

The sewing lessons make this point in that the required self-discipline and order are contrary to the child’s “lithe” and “active” nature (*UTC* 215). She artfully designs accidents in the form of broken, tangled, or discarded sewing notions, thus sabotaging the domesticating process. Topsy “[comes] into conflict with white domestic order in the house and with the world that blacks were making alongside or beneath that order”

(Lhamon Jr. 143). Like her theatrical counterparts,<sup>32</sup> Topsy rebels against the domesticating influences of the interlocutor/Ophelia.

The child's characterizations shift from thief and liar to a passive aggressive trickster with the fluidity and rebellion of the minstrel end-man. She is "despised" and "contemned," and "It was soon discovered that anyone whoever cast an indignity on Topsy was sure to meet with some inconvenient accident shortly after" (*UTC* 215-216). To the house slaves, her retribution appears in the form of missing trinkets or baubles, embarrassing staged accidents, and ruinous property damage. Being exonerated of any these crimes, Topsy "made the household understand the propriety of letting her alone" (216). The child trumps labor, domesticity, order and condescends authority in muted rebellions.

Topsy's theater of rebellion is slavery, her stage is the novel, and her set is the St. Clare home. One of her most notable and often cited performances occurs when she is left alone and unsupervised in Ophelia's bedroom. Topsy performs a sequence of chaotic comic fantasies accompanied by music, singing, and whistling:

pulling off the pillow-cases, butting her head among the pillows ... she would climb the posts, and hang head downward from the tops, flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment; dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia's night-clothes, and enact various scenic performances with that, -- singing and whistling, and making grimaces at herself in the looking glass. (216)

---

<sup>32</sup> "Once the minstrels were on stage they could not sit still for a minute. Even when sitting, they contorted their bodies, cocked their heads, rolled their eyes, and twisted their outstretched legs" (Toll 36).

To a modern-day reader, Topsy's dishevelment of Ophelia's bedroom would appear as typical childhood play for imaginative youngsters. The scene is not too far removed from the classic "pillow fight" and thus interpreted as a celebration of childhood. But for Topsy, a child who has not experienced childhood, Ophelia's splendid bedroom invites youthful pandemonium.

It seems as though a smirking hidden intelligence, marked by mnemonic singing and whistling, drives Topsy's mania. The clever end-man that she is, Topsy inverts the interlocutor's ordered props with ease, energy, and intentionality. She is an experienced practitioner.

The child repeats the Whitlock locomotive when performance sequences physically move from one sphere of action to the other on Ophelia's bedroom. She begins with chaos (a "pillow fight") and shifts into acrobatic posturing on the bed posts. Posturing is followed by fanfare (the flourishing of sheets) and pageantry (dressing the bolster in Ophelia's night-clothes). When the child stands before the mirror and "enacts various scenic performances" for herself, the Topsy locomotive makes a sequential inversion. She is conducting a performance within a performance.

Artist George Cruikshank captures the locomotive sequences in an illustration titled, "Topsy's Mischief" (fig. 8). Structured like a story-board, the illustration features Topsy framed in various stances "lithe as a monkey." In each of the sequences, the artist engages Topsy with distinguishing items: pillow, bed post, sheet, and mirror, but the semblance of Ophelia's bedroom disappears into an impressionistic background. The

barely visible background gives Topsy the appearance of being airborne in her various stances, suggesting an agile Other. Topsy appears child-like in the top three frames, but in the bottom, she looks like a much older woman with exaggerated head, arms, hands, and feet in ape-like masculine proportions. As the child is looking in the mirror, she appears to be studying her own image. This may be the artist's nod at the mirror casting a reflection that either confirms or contradicts the child's preconceived self, especially given the exaggerated mature masculine image depicted by the artist. Rustic bamboo frames each sequence while an elongated vine threads the locomotive together. Both the framing and intertwining vine lend to Topsy's Otherness. The overall image suggests that commonplace domestic items such as a feather pillow, bedpost, sheets, and mirror are cultural curiosities that beg active exploration.

Ophelia phrases Topsy's "perfect carnival of confusion" as "raising Cain" (216). The biblical Cain, having committed homicide in a jealous rage, was associated with causing trouble in general (Genesis 4:1-16). The minstrel Cain "disciplined to inoculate the world with trouble," ... was "never sure if "his protracted life [was] not a punishment," God's punishment. His tar-smeared face symbolized God's punitive mark (Lhamon Jr. 122, 126). Topsy with "hair cropped short to her head" (*UTC* 208) is Stowe's cross-dressed version of both the Biblical and the minstrel Cain (Lhamon Jr. 121). Inherent in blackface is contempt of blackness. Abolitionist David Walker challenges that "some ignorant creatures" tell blacks that they "(the blacks) are the seed of Cain the murderer of his brother Abel" ... and that" God put a dark stain upon [the

race]" so that they might be known as slaves to the whites (79, 80). The novel transfers this contempt and redirects it through other characters to Topsy. She is the object of shared loathing by Ophelia and the servants. Keenly aware of her Otherness, Topsy identifies the contempt as racial. "Couldn't never be nothing nothin' but a nigger, if I was ever so good." Race hatred transforms into self-loathing: "If I could be skinned, and come white, I'd try them" (245). Her pranks and mayhem symbolize rebellious responses to that contempt.<sup>33</sup> Through the Topsy model, "Stowe's assessment is that Cain's [nor Topsy's] power can be house-broken" (Lhamon Jr. 121). The child's will is irrepressible.

Topsy's desire for whiteness also alludes to an equally powerful biblical icon, Ham, Noah's son. Having witnessed his father lying in naked drunkenness, Ham boasts of the spectacle to his brothers. Blackened with dishonor, Ham's descendants were cursed to servitude. The proslavery argument asserted that Africans were Ham's descendants and cursed by his wickedness. Blackness in this context meant loathing and servitude incurred by immorality and dishonor. Topsy, whose blackness is laden with these Biblical connotations, equates civility and wholeness with whiteness. As with the Cain parable, readers would have been familiar with Ham's story as a proslavery argument.

Control of black children, then, is an unstated priority in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and through the Topsy/Ophelia paradigm, that control branches into two directions. Using

---

<sup>33</sup> Lhamon Jr. notes that blackface minstrelsy "existed in a pressure cooker of disdain. Raising Cain [was] a response to that disdain" (117).

Tom and Aunt Chloe as black parental examples for Mose and Pete, the text also suggests that black adult authority and instruction are insufficient. When Mose and Pete joke over pranks that they have played on the visiting slaves, for example, Chloe's "maternal admonishment[s] seemed rather to fail of effect" (*UTC* 23). Neither Chloe's slap nor her threats of more violence affect Mose and Pete's wild antics. They incorporate both into ongoing rough play. Tom simply attributes the boys' behavior to silliness.

In one direction *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suggests that uncontrollable black children should be managed through white brutality and violence. Ophelia, frustrated that verbal reprimands and treats are useless "controls" for Topsy, appeals to Augustine St. Clare for guidance. Although he professes to have rescued the child from brutality of drunken tavern owners, St. Clare suggests more violence. He recommends the very thing that Ophelia finds "perfectly horrible." Instructing Ophelia to whip Topsy into obedience, he advises Ophelia (tongue-in-cheek) that the whippings must be "pretty energetic, to make much impression" as he has seen Topsy whipped with a "poker" and "knocked down with the shovel or tongs" (*UTC* 214). The child's scarred torso confirms the abuse.

As evidence of St. Clare's observations, the child bears welts and callused spots on her back and shoulders. It is a durative and sentimental moment where the reader gazes with pity upon the horrible – a child's body etched and furrowed by beatings. It is an image prefigured in Prue whose back was so badly and freshly scarred, "she [could] never get a dress together over it" (*UTC* 187). Prue was beaten because she stole her master's money in order to buy "drink." But her behavior was not the result of



“wickedness” as she attests, but of a mother’s broken heart and broken spirit. “In the eyes of her slaveowner [Prue] was not considered a mother at all; [she was an “instrument to guarantee the growth of the labor force” (Davis qtd. in Grayson 6). The one child Prue was permitted to keep died from wanton neglect that Prue was helpless too remedy. Prue’s emotional pain superseded physical pain. So, rather than correct her penchant for theft and drink, ineffective beatings eventually became homicidal. Although the novel omits graphic details of Prue’s murder, the narrative hints that her mutilated body was left as fly-infested carrion.

While indirectly condemning slavery, by indicting Prue’s owners, Stowe sanctions Prue’s abuse through the voice of other slaves. According to Jane, Prue deserves the cruelty: Adolph, referring to Prue as a “disgusting old beast,” boasts that if he were her master, he would “cut her up worse than she is” (187-189). Stowe continues the cycle of the wicked slave, ineffective punishment, and sanctioned abuse with the image of Topsy’s etched and furrowed torso. She, like Prue, is a “despised outcast” (Donovan 86).

Ophelia’s discipline for Topsy, then, is caught between a rock and a hard place. Without more severe punishment, she will never control the child. And uncontrolled, Topsy’s conduct becomes the referent that Marie St. Clare finds so contemptible. But in punishing the child more severely, Ophelia loses religious and abolitionist ground with Augustine St. Clare. From this position, Ophelia can begin to understand Augustine’s conflicted situation as a slave owner — trapped between acting in accordance with pro-

slavery tyranny and acting according to his conscience. Placing Ophelia in a similar dilemma becomes motive for Topsy's purchase.

Historians and critics have pointed out that Stowe consulted slave narratives, abolitionist tracts, and interviews as sources for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Cultural historian Patricia Turner posits that through these sources, Stowe's pairing of Topsy and Ophelia "created a foil to demonstrate that under ministrations of the most stalwart, religious individual" a child born to slavery was destined to be an untamable 'wild child.'" The intent was to gain reader sympathies "with the tragic circumstances that resulted in neglected children such as Topsy" (12, 14). Yet Stowe undermines this effort as she constructs it. Rather than extend abolitionist rhetoric through the image of child's scars, Stowe sanctions the abuse by again shifting voice and perspective. She writes that the particulars of Topsy's first toilet were "not for polite ears." The evidence of a "neglected, abused child" would be too shocking (*UTC* 209). Yet as the narrative continues, it beckons the reader to gaze upon the "great welts" and "calloused spots" on Topsy's back and shoulders.

Jane, however, redirects the focus from abuse to what she perceives as obviously logical: "See there!" She says, pointing to [Topsy's] marks, "don't that show she's a limb?" ... I hate these nigger young uns! so disgusting!" (*UTC* 209). She suggests that the child's racial blackness drives misconduct, that "nigger young uns" deserve brutality. Through a black voice, black lens, and black language, the novel sanctions black abuse.

Both Jane and Rosa refer to Topsy in disgust as a “low nigger,” asserting caste superiority to the slave child. Dinah, who shares Topsy’s racial blackness and whose vanity has been assaulted by the two mulatta house slaves, takes the “low nigger” epithet as “a remark on herself” (*UTC* 208), an insult. Jane and Rosa mock Dinah’s hair, chiming that she “greases her wool stiff, every day, to make it lie straight” (181, 188). Despite Dinah’s daily ritual, “her hair “will be wool after all” (188). Dinah’s hair, unlike the mulattas’ tresses, is like Topsy’s, wool, the stuff of animals. Therefore, “low nigger” positions both Dinah and Topsy in the caste system as racial inferiors. Yet Dinah corrects the house slaves’ racial perspectives reminding them that despite differences, they too are “niggers” in antebellum hegemony.

In depicting Topsy’s supposed immunity to pain, Stowe conjures up the characterizations of Mose and Pete. After having exhausted all discipline options, Ophelia whips Topsy, but the child is completely unaffected. Topsy instead encourages whippings. “Laws, Missis, I’s used to whippin; I spects it’s good for me” (*UTC* 217). In truth, Stowe makes the whippings the butt of Topsy’s jokes, “Law, Miss Feely whip! – wouldn’t kill a skeeter ... Oughter see how old Mas’r made the flesh fly ...” (217). Through the eyes of a nineteenth-century black child crafted by Harriet Beecher Stowe, excessive physical discipline is ineffective: it is a game that has been mastered.

Topsy assumes Jane’s superior position and assigns wicked condemnation to black children as a whole. “Addressing the other children as “niggers” who are the biggest sinners,” Topsy boasts, “But lor! Ye ain’t any one on ye up to me ... I spects I’s

the wickedest critter in the world” (*UTC* 217). She closes her oration with a celebratory sunset and emerges “brisk and shining on a higher perch.” From this position the child “plumes” herself in all of her Jim Crow glory. Later Topsy explains her incorrigibility and pain insensitivity to St. Clare.

[O]ld Missis ... whipped me a head harder, and used to pull my har, and knock my head again the door; but it didn't do me no good! I spects, if they's to pull every spear o' har out of my head, it wouldn't do no good, neither, -- I'se so wicked. Laws! I's nothing but a nigger, no ways! (244)

Her remarks continue the novel's suggestion that black children can withstand brutality with relative ease. Internalizing both physical and emotional abuse, Topsy believes she deserves the punishment echoing Marie's sentiments, Jane's assessment, and Ophelia's teachings. The catalog of brutality that Topsy has endured leads to the indestructible black child. Henrique voices this belief in black child indestructibility attitude after brutally beating Dodo: “that Dodo is a perfect sprite, -- no amount of whipping can hurt him” (233).

Though Ophelia condemns Prue's death as “perfectly horrible” (*UTC* 191), Adolph sanctions it as fitting punishment for theft and alcoholism. Stowe's depiction of Tom as a passive, benign, child-like servant who desists from violence as a Christ-like figure is, perhaps, the muted point of the text, the subverted message of the novel. But when Tom is juxtaposed against the wicked Topsy, Stowe's abolitionist message is conflicted.

White control of nineteenth-century black children also functions through Christian love. Ophelia attempts the feat through literacy: reading the Bible and recitation of the catechism. Topsy begins:

Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created.’ Topsy’s eyes twinkled, and she looked inquiringly, ‘What is it Topsy?’ said Miss Ophelia. ‘Please, Missis, was dat ar state Kintuck?’ ‘What state Topsy?’ ‘Dat state dey fell out of. I used to hear Mas’r tell how we came down from Kintuck.’ (*UTC* 218)

Before the child decides to turn the recitation topsy-turvy, her eyes twinkle, signaling her intelligent designs. As Sarah Meer points out, Topsy is staging another end-man/interlocutor joke on Ophelia. Topsy undercuts Ophelia’s Christianizing efforts while disrupting her pedagogy. In doing so the child demonstrates that Ophelia’s idea of teaching personal love through rigid impersonal instruction is at best laughable.

Behind Topsy’s wild personae lurks her shadow, a darker self-hidden in an intelligence that she communicates in body language. The eye gestures suggest private self-talk while the posture communicates outwardly. The child’s eye gestures, a stereotype common to blackface minstrel performance, indicate a “self peeking through an ‘elaborately rehearsed mask’ and contradicting” the outward minstrel facade (*UTC* 206, Lhamon Jr. 142). Her twinkling eyes suggest a private laugh or joke (*UTC* 210, 218). To observers, the child performs according to expectations of the owning class: outwardly she assumes solemn and demure postures (207, 211, and 216). Her body language functions as a double-masking. Topsy’s hidden intelligence drives her wicked

machinations, but her exaggerated body language usurps the realistic import of such characterizations.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* offers a secondary model of Christian love for training uncontrollable black children. The novel situates that love in pure divine innocence of another child, Eva. Earlier in the novel, comparative portraiture of Topsy and Eva capture evil inherent in one's blackness and goodness in the other's whiteness. To contrast innocent vulnerability and immutable wickedness between the two children, the narrative employs biblical imagery. Topsy's "wild diablerie" fascinates Eva as a "glittering serpent" charms a "dove" (UTC 215). The allusion here extends to the Fall of Man precipitated by Eve's innocent vulnerability and Satanic designs in the guise of a serpent. The novel stages the battle between good versus evil between the two girls.

Eva, robed in saintly white, represents a feminized Jesus. Accordingly, the child is divinely empowered. Let us consider Topsy's contrasting depiction as a goblin-like, sooty gnome from Hell who captivates, sabotages, confounds, and "raises Cain" at will. When Eva asks, "What does make you so bad, Topsy?" (UTC 245), the slave child could have quoted the man from the Biblical city of Gadarenes possessed by demons: "My name is Legion: for we are many" (Mark 5:9). As the story goes, the demons, upon meeting Jesus, fled the possessed man and harbored in a herd of swine. This event lends some explanation for swine's uncleanness – the inhabitation of wicked spirits. More importantly, however, with slave children being rated with pigs/swine (Douglass 39),

Topsy's character would have assumed a similar demonic uncleanness, giving greater impetus to a successful conversion.

So Eva confers a loving touch upon Topsy while professing "heavenly" love to the slave child. "[Representing] the religion of Christian love"<sup>34</sup> (Gossett 143), reenacts Jesus's miraculous casting out of demons, but she does so through the "laying on of hands." Stowe crystallizes the scene with "the beautiful child, bending over" the grotesque sobbing Topsy. It "looked like the picture of some bright angel stooping to reclaim a sinner" (*UTC* 244). St. Clare confirms Eva's miraculous touch to Ophelia explaining, "It puts me in the mind of mother ... It is true what she told me; if we want to give sight to the blind, we must be willing to do as Christ did, -- call them to us, and *put our hands on them*" (245). Eva not only performs exorcism, but by not succumbing to Topsy's charming "influences" she redeems the first Mother.

Artist George Cruikshank bathes the illustration titled "Eva and Topsy" in spiritual light (fig. 9). Though the artistic intent is to render Eva as angelic, the barely discernible lines forming her white hair, skin, and clothing create a ghostlike image, especially since her figure does not cast a shadow. Leaning into the kneeling Topsy, Eva rests a loving, comforting hand on the slave's shoulder. Contrasting Eva, Topsy assumes a kneeling prayer position. Though her hands cover her face, they reinforce the prayer position as the artist places both children before an altar. The artist situates the conversion in an antechamber where profuse vine motifs cover the walls, framing the

---

<sup>34</sup> In 1830, David Walker writes that "pure and undefiled religion, such as was preached by Jesus Christ and his apostles, is hard to find in all the earth" (55).

children and lending a subtle exoticism to the illustration much like the profuse greenery landscaping the St. Clare home in the novel. Instead of dying Eva bestowing a bedside “laying on of hands,” ethereal Eva in the midst of the jungle converts the heathenish Topsy. The missionary lights the Dark Continent.

Topsy’s instant transformation from a wicked *thing* into the supplicant illustrates the slave child’s latent “docility of heart” and “aptitude to repose on a superior mind” like that of Eva the Christ-child (*UTC* 155). Witnessing Topsy’s conversion as a miracle, the servants “kissed the hem of [Eva’s white] garment” (252).<sup>35</sup> The servants’ actions suggest not only the belief that miraculous power emanates from Eva’s clothing, but more importantly, the gestures symbolize the strength of slaves’ Christian faith in the midst of oppression.

Stowe loads the conversion scene with spiritual energy that transforms Ophelia. Having witnessed the child’s admission of wickedness as a testament to conversion, Ophelia acknowledges her own bigotry. Topsy’s function in this context “is to demonstrate the irrationality of [blackness as repulsion]; her need for love teaches Miss Ophelia to overcome her fear of black bodies” (Meer 147). Earlier in the novel, Ophelia labeled St. Clare as a “professor of religion,” to which he conceded that he was not a “*practiser*” (*UTC* 155). But it is she who professed but did not practice religion, the hypocrite who preached but did not practice love. Using the model that divides

---

<sup>35</sup> Kissing the hem of Eva’s garment alludes to the Biblical woman who for twelve years had an issue of blood, wished for a miraculous cure by touching the hem of Jesus’ garment. Jesus tells the woman that her “faith” has healed and made her whole again (Matthew 9: 20-22).



characters “soteriologically, according to whether they are saved or damned” (Tompkins 513), Ophelia like Topsy is damned, but by her own hypocrisy. Ophelia is the model upon whom Stowe can solicit readers to “see to it that “*they feel right*” (UTC 385).

“‘Right feeling’ becomes a visible sign of the Election: one has judged rightly so and will so be judged on the Final Day. Right feeling, in short, becomes a way of separating the ‘sheep from the goats,’ of dividing the good from the bad” (Bellin 213). Ophelia, like Stowe’s readers, must resolve the racial bigotry which underlies the conflicted self in order to achieve right feeling and preparation for Final Judgment.

Through the simple act of admitting bigotry, Ophelia achieves “right feeling.” It is a partial victory in that Ophelia must strive to willingly accept the black embrace, but her civic and political actions mark an otherwise successful conversion. She secures the child’s legal freedom, educates her, relocates her North, and admits her to the Church. Perhaps these “loving” deeds replace the loving embrace. Both conversions, Topsy’s and Ophelia’s, reflect Stowe’s personal abolitionist designs. As a tool of redemption, writing the novel ensures the author’s “right feeling” about her role in the abolition of slavery thus securing her place in Heaven, as novelist James Baldwin argues (498).

This chapter, then, shifts from the antebellum floodlights of minstrelsy to consider reading Topsy’s Gothic characterization as an empirical event or a medium through which Stowe beckons the reader to see, feel, and act upon the spiritual consequences of slavery. St. Clare tells us that slavery “comes from the devil” (UTC 193). And Stowe’s concern was that, “If we trust to our own reasonings, our own misguided passions, and

our own blind self-will, to effect the reform of abuses [of slavery], we shall utterly fail” (“What Is to Be Done?” 43). The belief then, was that if America “did not repent its injustice and cruelty, the Union could not be saved and the promised day of grace would never come ... [Stowe] prophesied a grave national fate” (Husch 194).

St. Clare expresses a similar world view colored with spiritual warnings: “One thing is certain, -- that there is a mustering among the masses, the world over” (*UTC* 202). Historian Gail E. Husch identifies nineteenth-century world events that served as apocalyptic warnings: “Famine and pestilence in many parts of the old world... By 1848 the continuing impact of the Irish Potato Famine was apparent in the form of thousands of immigrants driven to American shores. The discovery of gold in 1848 unleashed an epidemic of gold fever, which, in 1849, coincided with the nation’s worst outbreak of cholera since 1832” (Husch 23-24). The disease claimed the life of Stowe’s eighteen-month-old son Charley in 1849 (Reynolds 28). Pious Americans viewed cholera “as evidence of God’s judgment, both horrific and hopeful, against personal and social sins” (Husch 32).

In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, St. Clare continues to predict a “*dies irae* coming on, sooner or later” (*UTC* 202). He recounts recent world events as examples of world musterings: the 1804 Haitian slave rebellion, the French Revolution, and “the uprising of the Hungarian youth against the Austro-Hungarian empire in the Revolution of 1848” (Donovan 88). He concludes with a prediction for the Haitian Revolution, a prediction with portentous implications. “If ever the San Domingo hour comes, Anglo Saxon blood

will lead on the day. Sons of white fathers, with all our haughty feelings burning in their veins, will not always be bought and sold and traded. They will rise, and raise with them their mother's race" (*UTC* 233-234). "The *dies irae* [however] cannot be read merely as a temporal revolution, initiated purely by human will." It is "the horror Stowe clearly feels at the prospect of human – and especially black – violence" (Gossett 389).

Earlier in the novel, George Harris, the slave son of black mother and a white father, has partially fulfilled this prediction. "From one of the proudest families in Kentucky, he had inherited a set of fine European features, and a high, indomitable spirit" (94). Having escaped an abusive owner, the disguised George arms himself with "two pistols and a bowie knife" (95). To his friend, Mr. Wilson, George proclaims, "But if any man tries to stop me, let him take care, for I am desperate. I will fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe. You say your fathers did it; if it was right for them, it is right for me!" (97). Voicing Patrick Henry's famous words, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" George's characterization invokes historical agency. He prefigures St. Clare's rebel, but the narrative attributes George's "high indomitable spirit" to his white European paternity. That paternity effaces his potential for African American martyrdom.

St. Clare's *dies irae* echoes the sentiments and predictions of militant abolitionist David Walker, who from 1829 to 1830 was "the most controversial and most admired, Black person in America" (Turner 17). Walker attributed slavery to greed – the love of money acquired from unpaid labor. In a five-part manifesto, titled the *Appeal*, Walker

calls upon oppressed citizens of the world to rise up against their oppressors. Walker writes,

I do declare it, that if one good black man can put to death six white men: and I give it as a fact, let twelve black men get well armed for battle, and they will kill and put to flight fifty whites.—The reason is, the blacks, once you get them started, they glory in death. The whites have had us under them for more than three centuries, murdering, and treating us like brutes; and as Mr. Jefferson wisely said, they have never *found us out*—they do not know, indeed, that there is an unconquerable disposition in the breasts of these blacks, which when it is fully awakened and put in motion, will be subdued, only with the destruction of the animal existence. Get the blacks started, and if you do not have a gang of tigers and lions to deal with, I am a deceiver of the blacks and of the whites. (45)

Walker redoubles warnings of slave rebellion with apocalyptic predictions. Speaking directly to white America, he charges: “that unless you speedily alter your course, *you and your Country are gone!!!!!!* For God Almighty will tear up the very face of the earth!!!!” (59). The *Appeal*, smuggled from Walker’s Northern business to slaves in the South, became a “must read” in some circles and banned in others. If Stowe had not read the *Appeal* or some parts of it, she would have been aware of its existence, given that planters offered “a ten thousand dollar reward for [Walker’s] capture, dead or alive.” The reward underscored fear of the *Appeal*’s power to “incitement to revolution” among the enslaved populations (Turner, James 13-14). Walker was found dead at his home in 1830, but his legacy of rebellion continued to fire the imaginations of the oppressed and the oppressors.

One of Walker’s disciples, Henry Highland Garnet, continued the call for slave rebellion in an 1843 speech titled “An Address to the Slaves of the United States of

America.” Garnett’s appeal carries certain urgency: “Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties and die like free men instead of slaves. ”He reminds his audience that slaves more than four million in number have the logistical advantage. With that advantage, a rebellion would certainly be bloody, if not successful. The violent thrust of Garnet’s speech exceeded the comfort levels of staunch abolitionists in attendance.

Stowe considers the possibility of a slave rebellion in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. St. Clare explains to Ophelia, “Just begin and thoroughly educate one generation, and the whole thing would be blown sky high. If we did not give them liberty, they would take it” (202). He adds, “My mother used to tell me of a millennium that was coming, when Christ should reign, and all men should be free and happy. ...Sometimes I think all this sighing and groaning, and stirring among the dry bones fortells what [Mother] used to tell me was coming. But who may abide by the day of His appearing?” (202). “St. Clare’s condemnation of the human race and his anticipation of the revolution are simply too powerful to be dismissed” (Gossett 218).

The years preceding publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were marked by slave “unrest and rebelliousness” (Turner, James 9). Nat Turner, a religious slave, claims to have been divinely inspired to take the yoke of Heaven that Christ had borne for the sins of men and “fight against the Serpent” (*The Confessions* 11). Turner further invoked apocalyptic visions borne out of Revelations to support his insurrection: “the time was first approaching when the first should be the last and the last should be the first” (11). His 1831 rebellion, moving from plantation to plantation, resulted in the murders of fifty-

five whites, some while they lay sleeping. Within the context of Nat Turner's Rebellion, Stowe's horror of black violence "goes some way toward explaining why she [had to] temper ... uncontrollable powers by subsuming them in the Divine Plan" (Bellin 215). Her uncontrollable slave character, pre-conversion Topsy functions as a metonymic portent of slave rebellion. Topsy's potential to mature into a Nat Turner, shades the importance of her conversion differently and gives that conversion a particular urgency.

First, it must be noted that slavery has transformed Topsy into a shrewd malicious, rebellious *thing* that defies all the laws of slave training. As demonstrated in the St. Clare household, she rebels against all forms of labor, order, domesticity, and authority. Punishment for her, even when brutal, is an exercise in futility. She does not embody "inherently simple, loving, childlike and docile" stereotypical slave characterizations found in Uncle Tom or Chloe (Gossett 137). "Slavery has robbed her of family and a moral order" (Meer 148). "As Topsy sensibly sees the issue, evil may be a better means for her protection than good" (134). She illustrates this perception in her effective manipulation of the house servants. Her unseen hand busied in passive/aggressive activity cures indignities that the servants' have visited upon her, i.e. Jane referencing the child as a low nigger. Topsy's malicious acts of retribution and muted threat of more hostilities discipline the servants into maintaining a respectable and safe distance. Her conversion must not rest only on the acceptance of Christianity. It must also include a transformed spirit which abandons aggression and violence.

Topsy is a referent for the novel's unseen African American children who are victims of slavery's social, moral, and spiritual darkness. Wickedness "enables her, at least, to maintain a sense of herself which she would lose if she accepted the conceptions of goodness taught by slavery" (Gossett 134). Ophelia's bigoted repulsion from blacks affront Topsy's sense of worth. Her bigotry undercuts her own moral system and positions her as a hypocrite to her own Christian tenets. So, her "moral system has no relevance for [Topsy]," who "has abandoned any ideal of goodness for herself" (134). For self-protection and to negotiate her world of slavery, "she steals and lies as naturally as she breathes, and the perceptive reader will grasp the truth that slavery produces many Topsy's" (Gossett 133). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* supports this theory through the child's brief history. The speculator has "lots of others," "heaps of 'em" (UTC 209, 210). "Such children are very common among [the peculiar institution], and such men and women too" (UTC 214).

Topsy models the wild, wicked, incorrigible black child as the product of slavery: she was "made" (UTC 215). As a symbol of slavery's underside, she is an indestructible black *image* that the novel fashions and refashions in Gothic valences. Her shape-shifting typology includes: goblin-like, thing, specimen, plague, heathen, black spider, sooty gnome from Diablerie, ugly creature, image, droll little image, practiced conjurer, and witch. Along these trajectories, Topsy is Stowe's collective spiritual demon: she is indeed Legion, the composite of many evil forms.

Topsy as wicked blackness, then, becomes a temporal example of “plague” potentialities. Topsy executes miniature rebellions within the slavocracy of the St. Clare house, but limits her destructive whims and carnivals of confusion to those household members whom she holds in disdain. Given her propensity for trouble and mischief, she is a demon in the guise of a wicked child. The child’s character and her fictional life is one of Stowe’s efforts “to establish the slippery and paradoxical principle that the Negro slave was *both* man and thing” (Gross 174). From this perspective, Topsy’s pre-conversion, darker self shadows the minstrel figure: she is both “child” and “thing.” Her darker self doubles to function as the harbinger of Stowe’s apocalyptic vision.

Ophelia pleads, “What is to be done with these Topsian children? (*UTC* 214). Managing such children requires swift immediate brutality, “to put them down at once” Henrique suggests (232). Yet brutality, St. Clare argues, perpetuates a cycle of “horrid cruelties and outrages” from owners. “Whippings and abuse are like laudanum, you have to double the dose as the sensibilities decline” (214). Eventually the brutality becomes ineffective. Topsy counsels Ophelia similarly: no form or amount of abuse can break the child’s will: she [Topsy] has been beaten so badly, she becomes incorrigible and irrepressible. In this light, she presents a danger of another kind – a force of dark energy and dark intention that can neither be controlled nor contained. She is the slave child who has not benefitted from slavery’s benevolent paternalistic training because she was “made” into a brute. Her depiction shrouded in metaphorical darkness, evil, and foreboding suggests that with maturation, Topsian slave children will regress into some



wicked thing that will turn the nineteenth-century American society topsy-turvy. Topsy is the potential savage slave, and as St. Clare reminds the reader, she is one of many. Garnett's logistics were not lost on Stowe.

### Conclusion

There is no doubt that in writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe fulfilled her desire to balance slavery's hard and terrible details with humor. She interwove scenes of family separations, exhortations of slavery's evils, and calls to readerly action, with scenes of enslaved African American comicalities and peculiarities. The author ascribed the bulk of that comedy to the novel's enslaved black children, whom she set to playful plantation mischief under the protection of benevolent paternalism. For these children, plantation was synonymous with playground.

Black child characterizations provided comic relief to the novel's sentimental melodrama; and in doing so, their spheres of action became emotional outlets or refreshing changes from the plots' growing anxieties and melancholia. Harry Harris interrupts tense slave negotiations and shifts the narrative focus to a minstrel-inspired performance. Mose and Pete merrily engage in rough play, naughty pranks, and wicked jokes to offset the impending emotional loss of their father Tom, who has been sold downriver. The other Shelby slave children erupt in raucous slapstick revelry to the unsavory slave trader and celebrate a successful slave escape. The enslaved black children are the novel's source of "good feelings."

Despite their affective purposes, the novel's characterizations of black children and black childhood are fraudulent representations of nineteenth-century reality. The children dance, sing, and perform tricks in the tradition of the minstrel "Jim Crow." Defying rules of civility, they erupt into comic minstrel disruptions at will, giving the general impression of uncontrollable wildness. With dark complexions blackened even deeper to contrast exaggerated white eyes and toothy grins, the children's dialogue echoes end-man jokes and stump speeches that confound and confuse characters of high culture. As historian Francis P. Gaines asserts, "If we think in terms of the millions of slaves, we are forced to the conclusion that neither ... Topsy [Harry, Mose, Pete, Sam, Andy nor the] ... end men of the minstrel line, nor a composite of all of these, delineated the actual black of the old regime" (Gaines 202). But the children's depictions convey the same message as their minstrel counterparts: shiftlessness and play.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* also presents the enslaved black child as a proposition for the conversion of heathenish black children into Christianized civility and eventual expatriation. From the preface to the conclusion, the novel appeals for the African savage in need of Christian enlightenment. Metonymically, then, the narrative crafts a black child, Topsy, who appears hell-made and hell-bent on raising hell just because she is so full of wickedness. She is the novel's epitome of the incorrigible black child whom no amount of brutality will control. Topsy's successful conversion fulfills one of Stowe's secondary political designs, the grooming of enslaved African Americans expressly for

expatriation, while achieving “right feelings” about participation in or lack of participation in the abolition of slavery.

Through black children, then, the novel subverts the primary abolitionist agenda that it so forcefully exhorts because the success of the conversion comes at the price of “depicting children as wild and uncontrollable pickanannies” (Haywood 419). The narrative systematically assigns Otherness to each child as he/she appears in the text. Harry Harris receives commands and praise from Shelby, much as would a favored house pet. Mose and Pete, two wooly-headed beady eyed, feral creatures, “roar” with animation and incorporate brutality into rough play. The remaining enslaved Shelby children are shiftless “specimens” and noisy pests for whom there is no labor, only rest and play. With the exception of Harry Harris, the Shelby children not only appear to enjoy brutality, they invite it while taunting the would-be oppressor.

All of the black child characterizations build up to and coalesce into the loathsome character of Topsy. Laying claims to incorrigible wicked behavior, Topsy invites and sanctions her own abuse. More troubling, other older black slaves voice that the child deserves it; sanction the abuse. The novel subversively reinforces the abuse of black children by repeatedly depicting them as insensate to pain and potentially indestructible. So when *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* condemns brutal homicidal beatings of adult slaves while advocating the abuse of enslaved black children, the abolitionist message becomes conflicted, and issues surrounding slave abuse become more pressing.

Given the mass national and international appeal of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Topsy becomes the iconic referent for the antebellum American enslaved black child, the representative enslaved child with all of the incorrigible trappings affixed. Although my research has contrasted the historical realities of black child enslavement with Stowe's fictional representations, writers such as Frank J. Webb and Harriet E. Wilson respond to Stowe's contrived "art" with empirical "art." In the following chapters, my scholarship examines their characterizations of black children in the American North. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* depicts intelligent black children who embrace humor and redefine Stowe's depictions of the wild, willful, and unruly child. Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* responds to Stowe's comic inventions of enslaved black children with an autobiographical inspired fiction recounting hard and grim Northern servitude.

CHAPTER III  
CHARLIE AND KINCH: FREEDOM AND CHILDHOOD IN  
*THE GARIES AND THEIR FRIENDS*

Introduction

Chapter Two examines depictions of Charlie Ellis, Kinch DeYounge, and black childhood in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857) as responding to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Both novels present willful and unruly black children, but *The Garies* contrasts ignorance, wickedness, shiftlessness, and indestructibility with intellect and industriousness. Webb's cast of children includes Clarence and Emily Garie; Esther, Caddy and Charlie Ellis; and Kinch DeYounge. Critical analysis of these children can be found in the scholarship of Anna Mae Duane, Elizabeth Stockton, and Samuel Otter. My focus narrows to Charlie Ellis and his friend Kinch DeYounge, characters whose "social and physical comedy" are hardly discussed by critics (Otter 240). In fact, scant critical attention has been given to the boys as Webb's responses to Stowe's black child characterizations in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In this chapter, I argue for Webb's representations of black children and black childhood through Charlie and Kinch as responses to Stowe's caricatures. My analysis explores the methodology by which the boys maintain plausible and positive images of black childhood as they create their own brand of comic misrule and slapstick humor.

Frank J. Webb was born a “free Black Philadelphian” (Gardner 297) on March 21, 1828. He married Mary E. (possibly Espartero) in 1845 (299). Mary, an excellent reader of poetry and drama, gave public reading tours in “cities along the east coast” of the United States (Sollors 1, 2). Mr. Webb accompanied his wife as she toured the United States and England (Gardner 299). Whether impressed by Mary’s oratorical skills or perhaps seizing a marketing opportunity, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *The Christian Slave*, a dramatic adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, expressly for Mrs. Webb (Gardner 7). Mrs. Stowe “went to great pains to aid the Webbs in a variety of ways,” including “gifts of clothing, money, and letters of introduction” (Clark qtd. in Gardner 306). So the Webbs’ relationship with her may have been reciprocal in that Mary’s public readings of *The Heroic Slave* would have extended and reinforced the popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as well as that of the author. “Mary Webb may have [also] offered a convenient Black mouthpiece through which [Stowe] could answer Black critics of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (Gardner 306). On the other hand, Stowe’s relationship with the Webbs may have significantly influenced their social success in England.

#### Publication Background

Mr. Webb appears to have written *The Garies* sometime between 1854 and 1856, a time when he was unemployed and touring with his first wife. While in England, he arranged for publication of the novel and gained endorsements from Harriet Beecher Stowe as well as Lord Brougham, both iconic figures in the abolitionist movement in the

United States and England. *The Garies* was published in London in 1857 by G. Routledge & Co. with two thousand regular editions bound in “blue cloth, blind-stamped, and lettered in guilt” and another twelve thousand more of the cheap series, “bound in thin yellow boards” (Otter 224-225). There is no evidence that *The Garies* was issued in the United States before a 1969 reprint edition, but “Webb’s novel was circulating among African American readers in the middle of the nineteenth-century” (Otter 225-226). Since the reprint, the novel has begun to receive the scholarly attention that it so richly deserves.

*The Garies* is of significant historical literary importance. It is “one of only four novels written by African Americans before the Civil War” (Sollors 1)<sup>36</sup> and the second novel published by an African American. Webb’s novel is also “the first work of fiction to describe the lives and problems of the free northern Negro; the first to include a lynch mob in its plot; the first to treat ironically the problem of the ‘color line’ ...; and the first to make passing for white a major theme” (Davis ii). *The Garies* is “the first to show white mob violence against Blacks in the North.” As such, *The Garies* “may also be the first novel to show us a separate, embattled, emergent Black nation within the United States” (Gardner 297). Another first is the novel’s treatment of “the theme of racial ‘passing’,” possibly the first to present a successful black businessman as one of the central characters and possibly the first “American novel about a legally married interracial couple” (Sollors 4). Literary critic Anna Mae Duane notes the novel as “one

---

<sup>36</sup> The remaining novels are William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (1853), Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* (1859), and Martin Delaney’s *The Huts of America* (1859-1862).

of the first texts to deserve inclusion in the black feminist literary tradition” (211). To the ongoing list of firsts, I submit *The Garies* as one of the first African American novels which responds to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Webb rewrites Stowe’s plantation mythology into a prototype of African American possibilities. His novel replaces Stowe’s caricatures with plausible representations of exceptional, intelligent, industrious black children.

### Structural Background

Through an intertextual metonymic network, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* maintains an absent presence in *The Garies and Their Friends*. Webb’s narrative structure mimics that of Harriet Beecher Stowe in that it employs metonymy, establishing a similar “totalizing effect” so that characters, scenes, and incidents, in the novel come to be apprehended in terms of other characters, scenes, and incidents (Tompkins 514). Webb expands this schema to another level: his metonymic web (no pun intended) extends from *The Garies* to Stowe’s characters, places, and themes, “[recreating] networks of meaning” (Twagilimana 9). I note several instances of this pattern within *The Garies* and its link to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Webb’s novel presents children for hired service through the characters of Charlie Ellis, Mrs. Ellis, Kinch DeYounge, and an unnamed servant girl. *The Garies* also enacts stages of capitalism and economic independence through Kinch DeYounge, his father, Mr. Ellis, and Mr. Walters. Similarly, Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Whateley repeat nineteenth-century Southern white ideological objections to black



children's education. Webb's characters Mr. Walters and Aunt Comfort allude to and revise Stowe's Uncle Tom figure. Charlie's sister Caddy and the Thomas's black cook Rachel debunk the disorder and shiftlessness which Stowe ascribes to Dinah and her kitchen. Intertextual relationships between *The Garies* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are more than coincidental.

Webb's novel also mimics Stowe in that it promotes literacy.<sup>37</sup> *The Garies* achieves this agency with intertextuality and a range of intentions layered within the metonymic web. For example, his novel prompts a rereading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through name association. Webb's cast includes a mulatto character named George Winston, a white George Stevens, and his son George. These names compare to Stowe's George Shelby and George Harris. There is also the philanthropic Mrs. Bird of Warmouth versus Mrs. Mary Bird, the senator's wife. Naming similarities extend even to animals: *The Garies's* Jerry the cat and Jerry the horse in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Webb's naming patterns subtly conjures an awareness of the text of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and gives the reader pause to consult Stowe's novel for clarity. In this regard, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* functions as a para-text to *The Garies*.

The novel begins in Georgia with Mr. Clarence Garie a white slave owner, his mulatta mistress, Emily, and their young children. The family removes to Philadelphia so that the couple can legally marry and so that the family will not be subjected to Southern slave codes. In their new home the Garies become friends with the Ellis family and Mr.

---

<sup>37</sup> I refer here to Barbara Hochman's *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution*.

Walters, black upper-class Philadelphians. They also live next door to the Stevens, white bigots who take pleasure in racial dissembling. As the lives of these families cross, intersect, and collide in the novel, this chapter examines Charlie Ellis and Kinch DeYounge as Webb's representations of black childhood. They enact the novel's dialectics on service for hire versus education while conducting willful pranks. Through Charlie and Kinch *The Garies* also explores friendship, community, industriousness, Northern racism, and racial uplift.

### Caricature Dismissed

Charlie is the only son and the youngest of three children in a black middle-class family. He prefers to wear "his most dilapidated unmentionables," or personal garments so that he can play without fear of soiling or ruining good clothing, symbolizing manners and gentility. We are also told that Charlie is

a bright-faced pretty boy, clever at his lessons, and a favourite both with tutors and scholars. He [has] withal a thorough boy's fondness for play, and [is] characterized by all the thoughtlessness consequent thereon. He [possesses] a lively, affectionate disposition, and [is] generally at peace with all the world ... All that was necessary to make up a day of perfect joyfulness with him, was a dozen marbles, permission to wear his worst inexpressible, and to be thoroughly up in his lessons. (Webb 30, 41)

The child's genteel personality and fondness for education emerge in the narrative as super-intellectualism. And though play with marbles often threatens an otherwise neat appearance, this imperfection distinguishes his childhood as normal. Marbles also

indicate physical dexterity; but more importantly, the game symbolizes childhood play, friendship, and community. Webb inscribes Charlie as middle class through appearance, manners, and speech, qualities which also imply whiteness.<sup>38</sup> But above all else, Webb presents Charlie Ellis as a “good and smart” child.

Compared to Charlie, Kinch is “quite [another] character.” *The Garies* details Kinch, Charlie’s friend, through appearances.

His most prominent feature was a capricious hungry-looking mouth, within which glistened a row of perfect teeth. He had the merriest twinkling black eyes, and a nose so small and flat that it would have been a prize to any editor, living as it would have been physically impossible to have pulled it out, no matter what outrage he had committed. His complexion was of a ruddy brown, and his hair entirely innocent of a comb, was decorated with diverse feathery tokens of his last night’s rest. A cap with the front torn off, jauntily set on the side of his head, gave him a rakish wide-awake air, his clothes were patched and torn in several places, and his shoes were already in an advanced state of decay. (Webb 42)

Most noticeably in Kinch’s description are words and phraseology which conjure images of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s minstrel-inspired characters. For instance, Kinch’s glistening perfect teeth and “twinkling black eyes” compare to Topsy’s “white and brilliant set of teeth” and twinkling eyes (Webb 42, Stowe 206). More noteworthy is the parallel between Kinch’s “nappy” hair “decorated with divers feathery tokens of his last night’s rest,” and Topsy’s woolly head which butted among the pillows which “would sometimes be grotesquely ornamented with feathers sticking out in various directions” (Webb 42,

---

<sup>38</sup> Literary Critic Robert Nowatzki defines whiteness as “a set of values, behaviors, manners, and styles of dress traditionally associated with certain socioeconomic classes. These classes are often related to specific racial/ethnic groups, in that upper- and middle-class qualities are often associated with whiteness and lower-class qualities are linked to subaltern racial/ethnic groups” (34).

Stowe 216). Kinch's patched clothing and decayed shoes suggest Stowe's black clown, Sam, whose nail-improvised suspenders support a pair of loose pantaloons (Webb 42, Stowe 37).

Webb, however, does not exaggerate Kinch's physiology and attire into clownish disproportions of stereotypical blackness. Not only does the ragged clothing suggest Kinch's lower socioeconomic status, but it also complements the child's infectious humor. After savoring a bite of Charlie's apple tart, Kinch exclaims, "Oh! my golly! Charlie, your mother makes good pies! ... Give us another bite, --only a nibble" (Webb 42). Kinch's robust appetite and appreciation for good food enhance his flair for mischief. Readers follow him as he brands the unsuspecting Robberts with a chalk drawing of the iconic skull and crossbones, instructs Charlie in pranks, and makes bawdy jokes. In Kinch, Webb presents a child who is neither a dancing fool nor a motley clown. He is a smart young man, whose twinkling eyes, nappy hair, "ruddy brown" skin, and ragged clothes complement his wit, wisdom, and rascality.

Kinch's world view, shrewd insight, and love for his friend Charlie transcend socioeconomic disparities between the two. Though Caddy Ellis complains that Kinch eats all of Charlie's lunches, the shared meals are but only one symbol of their friendship, and that friendship is reciprocal. When Charlie's problems arise, he seeks counsel from his "friend and advisor," the "redoubtable and sympathizing" Kinch (Webb 40). Together, in the spirit of best friends, brotherhood, and Bre'r Rabbit, Charlie and Kinch exercise wit and guile to affirm their humanity and their kinship.

Through Charlie and Kinch, *The Garies* explores dialectics between hired service and education for black children in nineteenth-century antebellum America. Service in the free North meant that black children were hired out to other families, often to supplement household incomes. Service could also disrupt, preclude, or worse, displace education. The narrative argues for and against hired-service (hereafter service) from three perspectives: Mrs. Thomas, a white wealthy pseudo-aristocrat; Mr. Walters, a wealthy black businessman; and young Charlie Ellis. Factored into these arguments are race, economics, education, self-possession<sup>39</sup> and common sense.

Mrs. Thomas's request for Charlie's servitude turns on loyalty, economic implication, and indirection. Her proposition to Mrs. Ellis begins: "I should think three children must be something of a burthen ... I really several times thought of sending to take Charlie off your hands: by-the-way, what is he doing now?" (Webb 37). The Ellis children have not been a burden. Ironically, it is Mrs. Thomas's grandchildren who are burdensome. Their "excessive wants" motivate her request for Charlie's service. Mrs. Ellis counters Mrs. Thomas's feigned concern and specious solicitation with subtle clarification. Charlie is a model student with nearly perfect attendance, and one whose future studies will include Latin and Greek.

While *The Garies* "marks the beginning of the historical shift in black writing from the theme of slavery to that of colour discrimination" (Crockett qtd. in Sollors 6),

---

<sup>39</sup> "With the turn of the nineteenth century ... the terms of self-possession ... shifted from being grounded in land ownership to being grounded in a core sense of the self ... legal theorists began to conceive of self possession as a kernel of the self that one could not alienate in labor" (Stockton 476). *The Garies* advocates education and capitalism as routes to self-possession for black children.

the novel signifies on slavery's influence through service. Webb reminds readers that even in the nineteenth-century free North, white attitudes toward black children and education are not dissimilar from those in the slave-holding South. Mrs. Thomas argues against expanding Charlie's education citing that Latin and Greek studies, for example, are useless in a black child's future. She warns Mrs. Ellis, "There won't be a particle of good result to the child from such acquirements," and limits Charlie's adult prospects to "a common mechanic, a servant, a barber, or something of that kind" (Webb 38).

Charlie's marginalized future echoes Mr. Auld's sentiments for the young Frederick Douglass. "Learning" he argues, "would *spoil* the best nigger in the world ... it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy" (Douglass, *Narrative* 44). Despite Charlie's academic success and promising future, Mrs. Ellis views service as a rite of passage and a gesture of loyalty. As a child, she too had been in service to Mrs. Thomas, so Charlie's mother agrees to temporarily place her son similarly.

The novel bridges Mrs. Ellis's childhood service to the Thomas's in a brief flashback. In Chapter II, entitled, "A Glance at the Ellis Family," we are initially told that Mrs. Ellis "came into the [Thomas] family as a girl." The following chapter, "Charlie's Trials" reveals that Mrs. Ellis as a child and her mother, Nanny Tolbert, migrated from Savannah, Georgia, to Philadelphia. Nanny dies soon after their arrival leaving the daughter an orphan (Webb 55, 34). The "daughter went to live with the Thomases," implying that she joined the family as a servant. Other clues that Mrs. Ellis

was most likely a charity case unfold with narrative progression. For example, Mrs. Ellis suffered “many a [childhood] cuff” from Aunt Rachel (38). The combined service experiences of Mrs. Ellis and Charlie reveal hired service as both socially inferior and potentially violent.

Charlie’s service also reveals a segment of Northern society rooted in illusions of European grandeur and in mythology of Southern gentility. For example, Mrs. Thomas’s notions of Charlie’s “service” are best described by the slave speculator Haley in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. He explains that in the South, enslaved young black children are placed into service as tenders, waiters, and so forth in plantation homes (*UTC* 4). As miniature representations of their adult enslaved counterparts, the children “set the place off”: they are status symbols. Charlie’s service fulfills similar purposes for Mrs. Thomas, who pretends to wealth and gentility. The child, dressed in livery of leather breeches and a blue jacket adorned with silver buttons, duplicates in miniature the livery of Mrs. Thomas’s adult footman, Robberts. Both child and adult, positioned together at the rear of Mrs. Thomas’s carriage, “set the vehicle off.” And the carriage entourage symbolizes British aristocracy, especially given that Mrs. Thomas “could prove a distant connection with one of the noble families of England.” The projected image also supports the Thomases claim to “membership of one of the first families of the [antebellum] South” (Webb 37).

The phonemic proximity of the names Walters and Walker is consistent with Frank J. Webb’s signification on extra-literary character naming. Mr. Walters, a friend of

the Ellis family, argues passionately against Charlie's service. He is a black wealthy activist who

was above six feet in height, and exceedingly well-proportioned; of jet- black complexion, and smooth glossy skin. His head was covered with a quantity of wooly hair which was combed back from a broad but not very high forehead. His eyes were small, black, and piercing and set deep in his head. his aquiline nose, thin lips, and broad chin, were the very reverse of Africa in their shape and gave his face a very singular appearance ... [When] he drew himself up to his full height, [he] looked like an ebony statue. (Webb 129, 134)<sup>40</sup>

Walter's towering stature compares to Stowe's "daguerreotype" of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom, who was a "large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black" (*UTC* 18). Both characters possess a "self-respecting and dignified air," but Walters contrasts Uncle Tom's "confiding and humble simplicity" (18) with a "commanding figure" (Webb 129) and an activist spirit. In fact, the focal point of Walter's parlor is a portrait of the black Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture. "Walter's interest in the Haitian leader suggests black revolution and violence rather than mere reform, and thus Webb suggests a radical response to racial oppression, whether in Haiti or Philadelphia" (Reid-Pharr qtd. in Nowatzki 38). His characterization may be based "in part on black Philadelphia sailmaker and activist James Forten" (Sollors 5, 8), and it may also be based in part on activist and militant David Walker. Walters is the

---

<sup>40</sup> " [Oroonoko] was pretty tall ... The most famous Statuary cou'd not form the Figure of a Man more admirably turn'd from Head to Foot. His Face was not of that brown, rusty Black which most of the Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polish'd Jett. His Eyes were ... very piercing; the White in 'em being like Snow, as were his Teeth. His Nose was rising and *Roman*, instead of *African* and flat. His Mouth, the finest shap'd that cou'd; far from those great turn'd Lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes" (Behn 13).



adult version of Charlie Ellis and Kinch DeYounge, all of whom fight in self-defense and self-determination, and he is also one of the novel's strongest advocates for literacy.

His insistence on Charlie's continued education is rooted in the fact that service positions ruin "good and smart" black children who become accustomed to working for and dependent upon a lifetime "stipend." Service destroys ambition as it "depletes and threatens ... self possession" (Stockton 476). Mr. Walters illustrates this point through the characters of Robberts and Aunt Rachel, the Thomases' black servant and cook respectively. (Notice that Webb yokes the two together alliteratively.) Both old servants are hostages to the Thomases' beck and call in exchange for stipends and benevolence. Their stipends are a mere pittance compared to Walters's millions. According to the Robberts and Aunt Rachel paradigm, hired service is simply another form of Southern bondage.

The anti-service sentiments also reflect pro-slavery propaganda which aligns servitude with benevolence. Nineteenth-century servitude, built upon a humanitarian model, was necessary for African Americans who were incapable of caring for themselves, or so went the antebellum argument. For those allegedly dependent individuals, service earns them basic survival needs: food, clothing, and shelter. This rationale scaffolds slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It also subversively drives Stowe's preface to *The Garies*. She writes, "Are the race at present held as slaves capable of freedom, self-government, and progress?" (Webb, Preface). To that end, *The Garies* is a socioeconomic political declaration that free nineteenth-century African Americans are

not only capable of freedom, self-government, and progress, but total self-sufficiency and wealth.

In forcefully arguing for the long term benefits of Charlie's education, Mr. Walters presents an alternative interim income source for black children. He advises the Ellises to "do as white women and men do" with their sons. "White parents do not send their boys out as servants. Instead [the parents] give [their sons] a stock of matches, blacking, newspapers, or apples, and start them out to sell them." These types of responsibilities, he explains, build business acumen and prepare boys for an adulthood in which they can ascend from "a small trader" to a "millionaire" (Webb 73-74). The novel initiates capitalism through the simplicity of one child's gift to another and structures ascension through the economic trajectory of Mr. DeYounge who operates a used clothing business; Mr. Ellis, a middle-class journeyman; and Mr. Walters, a millionaire businessman. In the literary world, Mr. Walter's economic model would later drive the thesis for Horatio Alger's "rags to riches" *Ragged Dick* (1868).

Walters closes dialectics by reminding Mrs. Ellis that "A great many white people think that [blacks] are only fit for servants," and that "it is impossible for you to have the same respect for the man who cleans your boots, that you have for the man who plans and builds your house" (Webb 73, 74). Charlie not only symbolizes Walter's views early in the novel as the Thomas's hired servant, but also with narrative progression, the child later experiences similar attitudes when he arrives at Mrs. Bird's estate.

## Charlie by Other Names

Webb relates Charlie's hired service by infusing British and American humor with Otherness. Learning that he has been hired to the Thomas household, Charlie rebels: "I'll be hanged if I stay there." Echoing Mr. Walters's sentiments, the child adds, "I'd rather be a sweep, or sell apples on the dock." More personally, Charlie understands the humiliation associated with service. "I'm not going to be stuck up behind their carriage, dressed up like a monkey in a tail coat—I'll cut off my head first" (Webb 40, 45). His "refusal acknowledges that domestic service transforms the self; by doing this work, he would lose his humanity and become a monkey" (Stockton 476). In fact, Charlie would have been riding behind the carriage on a "monkey board" (*OED*),<sup>41</sup> a British term which denigrates footmen as monkeys. Accepting his fate in deference to his parents' wishes, Charlie yields desire to filial devotion. For Charlie Ellis, service becomes a boyhood trial.

The child's uniform is the butt of jokes which do not escape Kinch's notice: "I saw you another time hung up behind that carriage, I declare, Charlie, you looked so like a little monkey dressed up in that sky-blue coat and silver buttons, that I liked to have died a-laughing at you" (Webb 79). Nevertheless the friend's teasing pales in comparison to that of other boys. Charlie laments, "the boys scream 'Johnny Coat-tail' after me in the streets, and call me 'blue jay,' and 'blue nigger,' and lots of other names.

---

<sup>41</sup> A monkey board is "a footboard at the back of a horse-drawn carriage or a bus, for a footman or conductor to stand on" circa 1840s (*OED*).

I feel that all that's wanting to make a complete monkey of me, is for some one to carry me about on an organ" (Webb 78).

Superficially, the taunts appear innocuous, but nastiness lurks behind naughtiness. "Johnny Coat-tail" stems from a minstrel tune entitled "Coon Dat Carried De Razor," published in Philadelphia circa 1850s-1880s (see fig 10). It is entirely possible that Webb was familiar with the ballad or its lyrical gist, given its publication in Philadelphia. The relevant lyrics read,

Dey cut poor Johnny's coat-tail off,  
Dey carved him to de fat;  
Dey chopped his ear clean off his head,  
Den cut his beaver hat. (Auner).

In isolation, the song's thrust is not the victim's demise but the "coons" razor wielding dexterity. Subversively though, the ballad carries sexual innuendo in Johnny's severed "coat-tails," and carving "to de fat." Charlie as "Johnny coat-tails," in the subterranean culture of heckling young boys, implies Charlie the castrato. While the bawdy implications run counter to the genteel air of Webb's text, the other names of which Charlie complains may have been equally lewd.<sup>42</sup> Webb leaves innuendo to readers' imaginations. As Charlie appropriately concludes, something must be done about "service."

---

<sup>42</sup> "Eighteenth-century slang for a footman was a fart catcher." (Encyclo).

Southern African American lore held the blue jay to be the devil's servant who could not be seen on Fridays because he was fetching sticks for the Devil.<sup>43</sup> The jay would reappear on Saturdays relieved that he was out of Hell. The implication that Charlie serves the Devil is ironic, in that the child's conflict is deeper with the black cook aunt Rachel, than with the Thomas family. He complains to Kinch that Mrs. Thomas "is not the trouble; it's of old aunt Rachel, I'm thinking ... that old aunt Rachel is a devil – I don't believe a saint from heaven could get on with her" (Webb 44, 79). Their antagonistic relationship is rooted in ideology and geography. For the aged Rachel, young Charlie symbolizes a violation of racially-informed social codes to which she rigidly adheres. Rachel can no more accept him as a representative of progressive new generation of African American children in the free North any more than she can accept modern cooking conveniences. She is a relic, like the forty-year-old "smoke-jack," trapped in time and in a vanishing culture. Her immutable character represents slavery's enduring ubiquitous nature.

To Charlie, Rachel is evil incarnate. Beyond her well-ordered, pristine kitchen,<sup>44</sup> the narrative fashions a still-life antechamber where the blazing fire propels "the most dismal noise" of the smoking-jack. Central to the image are Rachel and her cat napping,

---

<sup>43</sup> In old African-American folklore of the southern United States the Blue Jay was held to be a servant of the Devil, and "was not encountered on a Friday as he was fetching sticks down to Hell; furthermore, he was so happy and chirpy on a Saturday as he was relieved to return from Hell."

<sup>44</sup> Literary critic Elizabeth Stockton argues that Caddy Ellis is "by far the most fastidious housekeeper in the novel and perhaps of all antebellum fiction" (477). Yet Caddy is awestruck by Aunt Rachel's housekeeping. "She regarded with great admiration the scrupulously clean and shining kitchen tins that garnished the walls and reflected the red light of the blazing fire. The wooden dresser was a miracle of whiteness ..." (Webb 35-36). Caddy cautions Charlie that Aunt Rachel can make him wipe his feet as he goes in out, if no one else can (39), implying that Rachel's meticulous housekeeping is more obsessive.

the devil and her familiar (cat), frozen in time, bound by legend. Both she and her pugnacious pet, Tom, are “admirably matched: he ... snappish and cross as she ... resented with distended claws and elevated back all attempts on the part of strangers to cultivate amicable relations with him” (Webb 35). She is an evil despot whom Charlie hates as much as he fears.

In Rachel’s world view, black folks maintain respectful deferential places among white society, ideas steeped in Southern ideology. Her kitchen is the one area of her life in which she maintains expertise, and absolute dominion and from whence she wields tyranny (to other black characters), even Charlie’s mother. He complains that the old cook addresses Mrs. Ellis as though she were a “young girl” and threatens to whip him in his mother’s presence. To Rachel, Charlie is an incorrigible black child who willfully violates social hierarchies. She complains that he is “gittin’ bove hissef ‘pletely” and “dat she ‘spected nothin’ else but to what she be ‘bliged to take hold o’ him” (Webb 82). Her mind-set mimics the slave overseer. Frederick Douglass defines “getting above oneself” as the overseer’s perception of a high-minded, impudent, or presumptuous slave who must be “taken down a button-hole lower” or flogged. In reality, the perceptions were the overseer’s “excuses for whipping a slave” (*Narrative* 79). As tensions between Charlie and Rachel simmer, she awaits opportunity to whip the child into “proper conduct.” She has dat Charlie “in her sights,” and the “old witch” is “on his list.” It is a prelude to war.

Kinch offers Charlie practical and empirical boyhood advice for the situation – to “act so bad that the [Thomases] would be glad to get rid of [him]” (Webb 43). Kinch explains that after being hired into service, he “accidentally” “fell up stairs” and “down stairs with dishes,” “spilled oil on the carpet,” and “broke a looking-glass,” his employers realizing that he was too “spensive” discharged him (44, 45). He also counsels Charlie to accidentally assault Rachel’s corn encrusted feet and accidentally knock off Mrs. Thomas’s wig in the presence of guests. Charlie avows, “I’m determined to be as bad as I can” (79), thus terminating his service for hire with fair play.

#### “Train Up a Child”

In the chapter titled, “Mrs. Thomas has her Troubles,” Charlie’s attempts to get fired from service fuel madcap comedy. That comedy turns on Mrs. Thomas’s habit of “setting apart one morning of the week for the reception of visitors.” For all other days of the week she trained Charlie “for the important office of uttering the fashionable and truthless ‘not at home’” to her would-be visitors with “unhesitating gravity and decorum” (Webb 84). After a few “mishaps” Charlie appeared ready to perform the art of lying.

Before testing the child’s readiness, *The Garies* pauses to trace Mrs. Thomas’s glorious countenance on days when she is “not at home” to receive guests. We are told that:

A white handkerchief supplied the place of the curling wig, and the tasty French cap was replaced by a muslin one, decorated with an immense border of ruffling, that flapped up and down over her silver spectacles in the most comical manner

possible. A short flannel gown and a dimity petticoat of very antique pattern and scanty dimensions, completed her costume. (Webb 84)

In depicting Mrs. Thomas, Webb gives the same attention to details as does Harriet Beecher Stowe with the characters Harry Harris and Black Sam. After Stowe creates the magnificently beautiful Harry, she robes him in gaudy attire, and she layers clown costuming upon exaggerated blackface with Sam. Both strategies enhance the characters as minstrel inspired comic figures – Harry performs Jim Crow song and dance: Black Sam buffoons the minstrel end-man. Similarly, Mrs. Thomas’s costuming foregrounds comedy.

Equipped with a duster<sup>45</sup> she moves about stealthily inspecting her home, spying on servants, leading Aunt Rachel to declare, “Dat old Mrs. Thomas put [me] more in the mind of a ghost dan any other libin animal” (Webb 84). Shifting from an aristocratic to a domestic role, Mrs. Thomas’s behavior models the plantation mistress who sneaks about and spies upon house slaves, determined to catch them in some forbidden act. Frederick Douglass explains that plantation overseer Mr. Covey earned the nickname “the snake” for his cunning method of spying on slaves (*Narrative* 66). Mrs. Thomas mimics the plantation mistress and Covey by maintaining authority under the auspices of secrecy.

Charlie’s training, however, exposes the spy. When Lord Cutandrun arrives and presents his card on one of Mrs. Thomas’s “not at home” days, unhesitatingly and with decorum, Charlie ushers the guest into the drawing-room where “he knew that Mrs.

---

<sup>45</sup> “A cloth for removing dust from a surface: a dust-brush” (*OED*).



Thomas [in her aforesaid attire] was busily engaged in trimming an oil-lamp” (Webb 85). Comedy unfurls. Upon sight of Lord Cutandrun, Mrs. Thomas, exclaims, “Oh my *lord*,” then *cuts* and *runs* out of the room.<sup>46</sup> Caught unawares as a domestic, she illustrates the “thin line between decorum and pratfall” (Otter 242). British audiences would have especially appreciated the author’s clever punning, “a key element in European wit” (Watkins 60).

Fully exposing the underside of Mrs. Thomas’s aristocratic pretensions with raucous humor, comedy turns slapstick with a tinge of minstrel wordplay and African American signification. In her flight from embarrassment, Mrs. Thomas nearly falls over Charlie and berates him with familiar insults<sup>47</sup> “you limb!—you little wretch! ... You knew I was not at home!” Charlie, the end-man, innocently slips into rhetorical logic, “Why where are you now? ... If you ain’t in the house now you never was” (Webb 85). Confounding the interlocutor/Mrs. Thomas with the unexpected logic of “black naiveté” (Watkins 67), the child’s exceptionality fashions the old lady into the butt of a clever joke in both word and deed.

When Charlie “talks back” to Mrs. Thomas, his conduct confirms Aunt Rachel’s assertion that the child is “gittin’ bove hissef ‘pletely” (Webb 82). In doing so, he violates antebellum tradition depicted with the black servant Dodo and his young white

---

<sup>46</sup> “Cut and run” is an idiomatic expression which means “to hurry off” (*OED*).

<sup>47</sup> Marie St. Clare refers to slaves as an “ungrateful set of wretches, and the house slave Rosa refers to Topsy as a limb (Stowe, *UTC* 150, 213).

master, Henrique St. Augustine<sup>48</sup> in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Mrs. Thomas attempts to recover from embarrassment and restore order with reprimand. She orders Charlie, "Don't stand there grinning at me" (Webb 85). Harriet Beecher Stowe could only produce the black grin. Webb discloses its nature. "Chuckling over the result of his trick," Charlie "walked leisurely upstairs" (Webb 85).

"As Bad as I Can Be"<sup>49</sup>

Webb, like Stowe, endows the black child with the Bre'r Rabbit trickster trope. The enslaved teens, Sam and Andy, for example, employ wit and guile to antagonize the slave trader Haley and forestall his slave chase. "The trickster skillful use of wit to achieve a goal was simply played off against the stupidity and ineptness of a dupe" (Robberts 38). Sam and Andy depended on Haley's "perception of them as inferior beings and [his] blindness to their humanity" (39). But their tricks are born out of a need to please their mistress, Mrs. Shelby. Webb similarly endows Charlie with tricksterisms, but illustrates that ingenuity drives the mayhem as Charlie avenges his foe, Rachel, by proxy. He and Kinch arrange a secret fight in the Thomas woodhouse between "Jerry, a fierce young cat" and Rachel's beloved cat, Tom, who escapes with "a seriously damaged eye" and "fur torn off his back in numberless places." Unable to fathom the source of

---

<sup>48</sup> When Dodo attempts an explanation to Henrique, the latter strikes the slave child across the face with a riding whip, seizes one of Dodo's arms, forces him to the ground and beats the child until he [Henrique] is out of breath. Among Henrique's insults to the child were: "How dare you speak? ... There, you impudent dog! ... Now you will learn not to answer back when I speak to you." Later he rationalizes his behavior as a form of training. "it's the only way to manage him, he's so full of lies and excuses. The only way is to put him down at once,-- not let him open his mouth" (Stowe, *UTC* 232-232).

<sup>49</sup> Webb. *The Garies*. p. 79.

Tom's injuries, Rachel "bewails the condition of her favourite" (Webb 82). Having savored victory over Rachel through the mini battle between pets, the child's mayhem shifts from the woodhouse to the "Big House."<sup>50</sup>

Acting on Kinch's advice, Charlie throws the Thomas household into madcap confusion and disorder through a series of delightful pranks. The pranks assume special significance in that

Like the trickster's dupes who repeatedly fell victim to their own predatory needs and underestimation of the trickster's ingenuity, the slavemasters often blinded themselves to the potential of enslaved Africans to act in their own best interests by a view of them as grateful partners in the system. (Robberts 39)

Mrs. Thomas's preoccupation with her own image blinds her to Charlie's cleverness and potential for ingenuous mischief. She needs hired service in order to maintain the aristocratic façade. She views Charlie as she did his mother, as a black child for whom hired-service is a rite of passage. Because Mrs. Thomas marginalizes Charlie's adult future to servitude or menial labor, she considers her employment of Charlie as a favor to the child and his family. She perceives herself and her black servants as "grateful partners in [her socio-economic] system" (39). Charlie, as Webb's representative ingenious child, carries the potential to destabilize such power structures. Children such as he would scoff at servitude and pursue occupations that fostered economic

---

<sup>50</sup> "Big House" refers to the residence of the plantation master and mistress (Yetman 56, 60, 98). Mrs. Thomas's home symbolizes the Northern equivalent.

independence and selfhood, forcing the Thomases to bolster their egos through other means. Interestingly, Charlie accomplishes exactly this premise with rascality.

First, he fishes for Mrs. Thomas's wig.<sup>51</sup> Having been assigned to remove the cover from the soup tureen at a dinner gathering, he places a crooked pin on the elbow of his sleeve so as to simultaneously snag and remove the wig. As a result, her "short white hair" becomes the centerpiece of a dinner party designed to showcase her newly imported china (Webb 86). Extending the joke and compounding humiliation, Charlie hands the wig to Mrs. Thomas in full view of her guests while apologizing for the *accident*. He parodies training and punctuates the joke by returning the wig with feigned gravity and decorum, leaving the old lady powerless to contain the humiliation. So what begins as a child's prank evolves into the unmasking of a pretentious plebian.

The prank reverses a trend where "[b]lack people were common victims of practical jokes in early nineteenth-century imagery, emphasizing their humiliating social position and powerlessness" (Boime 93). A key image of minstrelsy was the erosion of African American hair into wool. According to pseudo-scientists such as Samuel Cartwright, hair was a determinant of humanity. Accordingly, wool instead of hair confirmed that African Americans were a sub-species of humanity. Stowe employs "wool" imagery to depict enslaved black children such as wooly-headed Mandy. Her characters were the butts of the novel's humor. When Charlie lifts Mrs. Thomas's curling wig, he exposes hair, but it is short and white. The old woman in short white hair

---

<sup>51</sup> In the opening act of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, young boys in the theatre balcony dangle fish hooks to snatch wigs from the unsuspecting guests seated below (Rostand 1.1).

framing a “face as red as peony” appears as a clown. Her one effort to salvage some dignity goes afoul and creates more humor. She replaces the wig backwards.

Charlie’s wild and wicked mayhem would have been triumphed in the Southern slave quarters as first-rate Bre’r Rabbit. After hosting dinners, Mrs. Thomas, much like the plantation mistress, would wait for the servant to fall asleep then secretly survey her kitchen stores.<sup>52</sup> In anticipation of this ritual, Charlie “[imprisons Aunt Rachel’s] cat in a stone jar.” Mrs. Thomas, during one of her excursions, lifted the lid, the cat “tired of his confinement, [springs] out, and, in doing so, knock[s] the lamp out of her hand, the fluid from which ignited and ran over the floor” (Webb 87). Aunt Rachel concludes the obvious, “ebery ting turned upside down; why dere’s bin a reg’lar ‘strubance down here” (89), as the prank launches Topsian mayhem flavored with hilarity. Rachel, unable to recognize her pet singed from the fire, chases and assaults him until she has been brought into full understanding of Charlie’s role in cat’s altered appearance. Rachel redirects rage at Charlie, igniting simmering tensions between the two and culminating into a brief epic slapstick battle. As the old cook “pitched into [the child] to give him particular fits” (Webb 90). Charlie, acting on Kinch’s advice, stomps on her corn encrusted foot and drives off Robberts by attacking his rheumatic shins.

By striking back, he sharply contrasts the Shelby plantation slave children who incorporate the aggressor’s violence into antics and play (*UTC* 36). Charlie responds to

---

<sup>52</sup>Margaret Walker addresses the plantation mistress’s greed in *Jubilee* (1966). After canning preserves, Big Missy would give a big dose of ipecac to a slave girl. This was intended to induce vomiting so that the slave mistress could determine if the slave “was eating (or stealing Big Missy’s) ‘zerves and jams and jellies” (131).

aggression with aggression. He strikes back, however, in self-defense, fulfilling Esther's prediction that he "behaves improperly to an old person" because he has been "goaded to it by some harsh usage" (Webb 77). His actions also parallel Topsy's in that she assails those who malign her. For both children, free and enslaved, the chief adversaries are other African Americans with links to Southern slavery. Rachel appears as a relic of slavery, physically displaced in the free North but rigidly adhering to antebellum racial codes. She interprets Charlie's manners as pretensions of whiteness, relegating her as his racial unequal, inferior. Moreover, the child's middle-class life further compounds inequality between the two. Charlie offends Rachel's crude sensibilities. She dislikes him because she thinks that he perceives himself as better. For the old cook, "particular fits" or beatings will humble Charlie back into her world order.

Tensions between Charlie and Rachel parallel and invert the Rosa, Jane, and Topsy paradigm. The mulatta St. Clare house slaves consider themselves non-black and distinguish themselves from the other black slaves by drawing attention to complexion, hair, and bawdy pretensions of gentility. They reject Topsy as a "low nigger" worthy of their contempt. She responds to their hostility with wicked "accidents." Though the house slaves disparage Topsy as their extremely black inferior whose otherness sanctions abuse, they do not inflict physical harm. The child's scarred torso results from abusive white owners. Yet, we can infer from her treatment of Rosa and Jane that Topsy is an experienced practitioner of passive aggression. Like Charlie, she strikes back, but limits

retaliation to anonymous covert subversion. Both children exercise survival skills and selfhood.

Charlie is Webb's response to Stowe's black child caricature. Antics and performance guide black child misrule in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the struggle to assert self-possession over servitude drives Charlie's conduct. Through madcap he embodies the daring, swashbuckling pirate implied by Kinch's iconic skull and cross-bones. As he departs service, he sticks his tongue out at Rachel in a final triumphant gesture. Rachel interprets it as a sign of disrespect and hurls a turnip at the hero, but the missile strikes and injures Robberts' eye. Through the lens of metaphor, Charlie symbolizes self-possession that can neither be disembodied nor dissuaded. His refusal to lie for Mrs. Thomas reveals he has received proper "training" and has been exposed to models of good character at home and school. We know this because Mrs. Ellis insists that the child apologize to Aunt Rachel, but he refuses. Later, and upon his father's insistence, Charlie makes the apology, reinforcing civility and character.

The child's service experience reveals violence that loosely mimics Southern slavery. After wig fishing, Mrs. Thomas "almost demolished him in her wrath; not ceasing to belabor him till his cries became so loud as to render her fearful he would alarm the guests" (Webb 86-87). And after having been identified as the source of more mayhem, "He was dragged forth, shaken, pummeled, and sent to bed with the assurance that his mother should be sent for in the morning, to take him home and keep him there" (88). After having been "almost demolished," "shaken," "pummeled," and subjected to

“particular fits” Charlie appears unharmed, unaffected. In one day, Charlie has been thrice beaten. As the narrative justifies the beatings as punishment for misconduct, it simultaneously illustrates that violence is an ineffective deterrent to self-determination. Despite the beatings, Charlie “[goes] to bed and [passes] a most agreeable night” (88). His desire to escape service drives conduct which supersedes his fear of violence reprisals.

Emerging from service unharmed, Charlie’s physical wholeness implies not only insensitivity to pain, but indestructibility akin to Stowe’s characters Mose, Pete, and the remaining Shelby slave children. In contrast, the promise of new livery, a new “button-covered blue coat,” leather breeches and return to service triggers a watershed moment. The uniform symbolizes the totality of hired service, an experience which has displaced him from family and friends, disrupted his childhood, compromised his dignity, subjected him to violence, and completely disregarded his intellect. The possibility of more service moves the child to tears. And after returning home, he falls down a flight of stairs, and the nearly fatal injury proves Charlie’s implied indestructibility to be false. The pain causes fainting, and the injury requires long-term recovery.

Charlie’s convalescence appropriates Kinch’s version of Topsy “raising Cain.” Earlier the text foregrounds the range of Kinch’s comic potential. First, the wicked child “tags” the unsuspecting Robberts with urban art, a chalk drawing of the skull of crossbones. Kinch’s art appearing on fence corners was “to convey to Charlie the intelligence that he had already passed” that location (Webb 42). Kinch foregrounds



contemporary urban artists in his ability to “tag” in the most unlikely places. He “tags” Charlie’s livery jacket and the unsuspecting Robberts’ coat. The knack for spontaneous mischief positions Kinch as Charlie’s best counsel.

The friend offers comic empirical advice to Charlie on becoming discharged from service. And the redoubtable Kinch transforms Charlie’s sick room into an impromptu stage where he [Kinch] entertains his ailing friend with raucous comic skits.

He devised butting matches between himself and a large gourd which he suspended from the ceiling ... dressed himself in a short gown and nightcap, and made the pillow into a baby, and played the nurse with it to such perfection, that Charlie felt obliged to applaud by knocking with the knuckles of his best hand upon the head-board of his bedstead ... On the whole, he was so overjoyed as to be led to commit all manner of eccentricities ... that Charlie laughed himself into a state of prostration. (Webb 101)

Like Stowe’s Topsy, Kinch’s performance turns on transitions through comic sequencing and with similar props. Topsy butts her head into Ophelia’s pillows: Kinch butts a suspended gourd. Topsy dresses in Ophelia’s clothes: Kinch simply dons night clothes stuffed with a pillow. Topsy performs acrobatics on Ophelia’s bed: Charlie claps his hand against his headboard. Kinch mimics Topsy’s “Whitlock Locomotive” sans locomotive whistle. Both performances are uninhibited, and both children are the producers and the butts of their humor. Yet each performance targets a different audience and with different purpose.

Topsy’s humor, born out of exaggerated minstrel Otherness, is a segment of ongoing comic vignettes that balance melodramatic scenes with heightened narrative

tensions in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Her self-entertainment highlights the child's alleged inherent wildness or heathenism, her non-whiteness. Within the novel, she is both performer and audience. Kinch's "raising Cain" moves his ailing friend and sole spectator to boisterous laughter. It is a source of healing rather than the subject of derision. Webb situates this humor exclusively within childhood play. Kinch's comedy shifts tonally from lighthearted humor to ridicule upon Mrs. Bird's arrival.

With Mrs. Bird, Kinch's humor moves from self deprecation to ridicule of the Other. The narrator describes her as "a fat benevolent-looking lady" and calls attention to her size by emphasizing her limited mobility. She apologizes for her difficulty in "[getting] up and down often" (Webb 102). Kinch confirms the narrator's "fat lady" humor by making faces out of her view. When Mrs. Bird offers to take Charlie to her Warmouth home where he can heal and return to Philadelphia as "stout" as she, "the bare idea of Charlie's being brought to such a state of obesity" causes Kinch to "roll about the floor in a tempest of mirth" (103). In this passage, humor comes again at the expense of obesity, and the narrator is complicit in the ridicule. Kinch's conduct also distinguishes cultural and social disparities with Charlie.

The obesity jokes resume with Charlie's clothing and a polite form of playing the dozens. Charlie's preparations to visit Mrs. Bird's Warmouth estate for his long-term recovery include a new suit of clothing. He complains, "you'll have to get a search warrant to find me in the jacket ... just look at these sleeves—if ... any one were to offer me a half dollar, they would change their mind before I could get my hand out to take it"

(Webb 114). Kinch humorously refers to Charlie's new coat as a "pea-jacket" or a peasant's coat. Historically, the pea-jacket was sailors' standard issued apparel, known to be worn tight fitting. In this case, Kinch notices the opposite, concluding that the coat fits Charlie "like a shirt on a bean-pole or rather it's like a sentry's box—it don't touch you any where." Exaggerating Charlie's oversized pants, Kinch ties a string around his friend's neck asking, "don't they always tie a rope round a man's body when they are going to lower him into a pit? and how on earth do you ever expect we shall find you in the legs of them trousers, unless something is fastened to you?" (Webb 114-115). Kinch attempts to compensate for the extra girth in Charlie's pants by stuffing them with a pillow, repeating the bedroom antics, as he teases Charlie with names which imply extreme obesity, "Squire Baker," "Daddy Downhill" and "Daniel Lambert" (Webb 116). Historically, Daniel Lambert of Leicester, England, known for his extraordinary size, was at one point documented as the largest man in the world. By the time of his death in 1809, he weighed 53 stones<sup>53</sup> and his waist measured at more than nine feet in circumference (vintage views.org) (fig. 11). Webb's nineteenth-century British audiences would have easily made the reference, but the fascinating historical referent might escape notice of contemporary audiences.

Kinch's parting gift for Charlie shifts tone from humor to practicality. The gift is a bag bearing a young pig, which Kinch rationalizes is "just the thing to take to the country" where "Charlie can fatten him up and sell him for a lot of money" (Webb 117).

---

<sup>53</sup> A stone is "a measure of weight, usually equal to fourteen pounds" (*OED*). Mr. Lambert's weight exceeded seven hundred forty pounds.

The odd gift of a pig in a poke seems out of sync with the plot, setting, and characters, thus posing an enigma. However thematically, Kinch's gift is appropriate. It reflects Mr. Walters's advice that African American boys should acquire business acumen by learning to sell things. Kinch's gift is "start up" capital that will introduce Charlie to commerce. In addition, the prediction that Charlie will profit handsomely from the sale of a fattened pig subversively implies an economically secure future, one independent of hired service. Later in this chapter, I will argue that the pig in a poke is another example of Webb's shrewd humor.

#### Servitude Revisited at Warmouth

As the narrative transitions geographically from Philadelphia to Warmouth, *The Garies* pauses to illustrate the Northern prevalence of Jim Crow laws. Earlier, *The Garies* foregrounds racial segregation when Mrs. Ellis laments, "How provoking it is to think, that because persons are coloured they are not permitted to ride in the omnibuses or other public conveyances!" (Webb 75). On the train from Philadelphia to Warmouth, the novel illustrates her concerns. Despite Mrs. Bird's objections and pleas, and despite Charlie's fragile health, the train conductor forces him from the "whites only" car to another separate filthy car designated for blacks. Once again, the child is "riding at the back of the carriage." The scene reminds readers that even sick and injured African American children did not escape white hostility. The scene also draws attention to public humiliation that African American children suffered under Northern racism.

Charlie removes to the dirty train car and refuses to permit Mrs. Bird to suffer the same indignity. He exhibits grace and dignity under oppression while exposing vulgar incivilities which accompany racism.

Mrs. Bird's attempts to protect Charlie, however, forfeit "part of her [white] skin privilege" (Nowatzki 43) and earn an abolitionist branding. Abolitionism and racial taint being equal (43), Mrs. Bird's efforts reduce her to black inferiority. A bystander on the train confirms this theory, labeling Mrs. Bird as "some crack-brained abolitionist. Making so much fuss about a little nigger! Let her go into the nigger car – she'll be more at home there" (Webb 119). Webb uses this event as justification for abolitionism which he voices through Mrs. Bird. She concludes that the experience is "enough to make any one an abolitionist, or anything else of the kind, to see how coloured people are treated" (120). The experience reaffirms her social activism.

The Mrs. Bird/Charlie paradigm revises Ophelia/Topsy model for black child education. Mrs. Bird, a white benevolent social activist, learned of Charlie's injury during a visit to his home. Her characterization obliquely parallels Mrs. Mary Bird, the senator's wife in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Mary Bird participates in transforming the fugitives Eliza and Harry Harris from slavery to freedom when she (Mary) provides for the mother and child materially with temporary food, clothing and shelter. Mary Bird has suffered the death of a son, and Harry Harris symbolically becomes a surrogate by wearing the dead child's clothes. She also comforts the fugitive family as she provides safety, persuading her husband to abandon his position on the Fugitive Slave Law and

assist with Eliza's escape North. Mrs. Mary Bird models compassion, safety, and advocacy as she represents family.

Webb's Mrs. Bird offers her Warmouth country estate to Charlie as a secondary home where healing, education and childhood can continue. She is a white widow who has also lost her only son to death, and Charlie becomes her surrogate whom she protects and for whom she advocates racial equality. In each instance, the Bird residence offers a safe private neutral space. Even though while the senator's home is a temporary refuge, a way station for the slave fugitives, Mrs. Bird, the widow, offers permanence to Charlie.

The village name, Warmouth, carries a range of connotations. Though the village is geographically nonexistent, it is worth noting the name's phonemic proximity to Yarmouth, a city in *Robinson Crusoe*. And it is to present Charlie with a copy of the novel that prompts Mrs. Bird's visit with the Ellis family. In Warmouth, Charlie begins a new life in an unfamiliar city, paralleling Robinson Crusoe's life anew on a deserted island. Beyond this parallel, the novel's intertextual relationships warrant separate scholarship, and comparisons between the two stop here. The name Warmouth puns on Mrs. Bird, as the novel's exemplar or "war mouth" on social inequality. Similarly the Warmouth location stages her advocacy for Charlie, and to that end, the village is indeed a "mouth of war."

Her country estate is an ideal pastoral playground with cultivated fields where a boy can run about freely, a river where he can fish at leisure, and a waterfall whose echoes spark childhood imaginations. Charlie exclaims, "What a beautiful place,--what

grand fields to run in; an orchard, too, full of blossoming fruit-trees! Well, this is nice” (Webb 151). It is a pastoral playground for the urban child, but there is poison in paradise. Webb aligns the expanse of Mrs. Bird’s estate with racism’s pervasiveness. Her white servants mistakenly assume that Charlie’s arrival signals a new addition to the staff, and these misperceptions drive the servants’ conduct. Betsey, the maid, forces Charlie to take his meal after she and the others have completed theirs. She poses the question, “What on earth can induce you to eat with a nigger? ... I couldn’t do it; my victuals would turn on my stomach. I never ate at the same table with a nigger in my life” (Webb 149). Betsey conjures imagery of Ophelia’s reaction and repulsion to little Eva kissing Mammy (Stowe, *UTC* 143). Betsey extends Ophelia’s repulsion of Blackness from the touch to shared space, “sitting at the same table” with the offensive Other. Charlie suffers the private humiliation that Mr. Walters has experienced publicly.

Mr. Walters had been refused hotel service because “They did not permit niggers to eat at their tables” (Webb 134). In a retaliatory act, he purchases the hotel and refuses to renew the landlord’s lease, stating to the offender, “You refused to have me in your house – I object to have you in mine” (134). Stockton explains, “Walters’s example serves as a powerful model of how, by accumulating property, African American men can enact racial justice outside of the biased and racist legal system” (483). In this context, Kinch’s gift of a young pig assumes greater relevance for Charlie. Profits from pig would create economic power which could translate into social and political power.

Though Mrs. Bird “corrects” the offenses, the child’s initial experience at her estate renews the novel’s impetus for education. He was a symbol of the Thomas’s wealth and pseudo aristocracy. The servants at the Bird estate, however, reveal more racially-informed Northern attitudes towards black children as Charlie’s guest status mistakenly erodes into service. Alfred, the gardener boasts, “I can order [Charlie] around more ... than if he was white, and he won’t get his back up half as often either” (Webb 150). He imagines Charlie in such odd jobs as cleaning boots, driving cows, and other little chores. More immediately, he exploits the child’s labor by reassigning his [Alfred’s] job of boot cleaning. Charlie soliloquizes that being in service to a servant “is worse than being with Mrs. Thomas” (Webb 152). Mrs. Bird’s servants enact Mr. Walters’ critique on racially informed, class-biased attitudes. They reduce Charlie to their inferior Other, the servant to the servants.

“A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste.”<sup>54</sup>

A recurring motif in *The Garies* is the good and smart child. The novel’s opening pages interrupt polite bantering among the Thomases’ dinner party guests with a moment of black instruction. While guests attempt to determine the “antiquity of the use of salad,” a gentleman remarks disparagingly about “the intelligence of the children of Ham” (Webb 20). Charlie, a servant, interrupts the conversation with an answer to the

---

<sup>54</sup> This slogan launched in 1972 to encourage Americans to support the United Negro College Fund.



“salad” question, and he references that answer to Chaucer in a nearby text.<sup>55</sup> In this instance, Charlie’s intelligence exceeds that of the dinner guests.

A guest sums up the child’s aptitude in Biblical allusion and metaphor punctuated with black dialect: “the child of Ham [knew] more than the child of Shem dis time” (Webb 20). The guests allude to the Biblical parable of Noah, his sons, and wisdom. Ham unwisely leaves Noah’s naked body exposed as the father lay in a drunken sleep, drawing Noah’s wrath and a curse. Proslavery advocates interpreted the parable to argue that Africans were the descendants of Ham. But Charlie’s aptitude disrupts the alleged causal relationship between racial blackness and ignorance in much the same manner as his interruption of the dinner guests disrupts the equation between racial blackness and servitude.

Mrs. Morton dismisses the child’s intelligence with a racial joke. She explains that Charlie’s intelligence is “not so wonderful, owing to the frequent and intimate relations into which ham and salad were brought” (Webb 20). Superficially the joke turns on food entrees, but subsequent analyses suggests other possibilities. One consideration is that the joke extends the Ham metaphor into a pun on salad. Within its connotative range “salad” is another word for a commotion or a mess. And given the commotion that Ham caused with Noah, the joke suggests a parallel between African Americans and disorder. To that end, and given Charlie’s pranks upon the Thomas household, the joke becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

---

<sup>55</sup> “They yede about gadering pleasaunt salads which they made hem eat” (Chaucer. *Floure & Leafe* qtd. in *OED*).

An inside view of Charlie's urban school illustrates Webb's emphasis on education. The "good and smart child" motif recurs with studies which include the classics, penmanship, geometry, and geography. Charlie's education teaches beyond basic reading, writing, and 'rithmetic at a time when literary pursuits remained illegal for African Americans in slave-holding states. The child's fictional school also offers insight into Webb's vision of classroom dynamics. Children unprepared for class were subject to flogging. Kinch laments that without Charlie's tutoring, he'll "get licked every day in school, for who shall help [him, Kinch] with his sums [math]" (Webb 117). A glimpse of the classroom realizes Kinch's concerns.

The lessons were droned through as lessons usually are at school. There was the average amount of flogging performed; cakes, nuts, and candy, confiscated; little boys on the back seats punched one another as little boys on the back seats always will do, and were flogged in consequence. Then the boy who never knew his lessons was graced with the fools cap, and was pointed and stared at until the arrival of the play-hour relieved him from his disagreeable position. (43)

Punishment restores classroom order from boyish misrule. Misrule, however, does not interrupt learning: it interrupts the monotony of nineteenth-century "droned lessons."

Flogging, a negative reinforcement, was a universal component of the learning process.

*The Garies* presents Charlie's education as one which prepares students for competition in a democracy.

Charlie's intellect and love of learning translates into consistent and exceptional academic excellence. He prefigures what W. E. B. DuBois would later coin as the "talented tenth" of exceptional African American men who "must be made leaders of

thought and missionaries of culture among their people” (75). Mrs. Bird affectionately refers to the child as her protégé. Recognizing his potential, she seeks Mr. Whateley’s influence in gaining Charlie’s admission to an exclusive white Warmouth school. She explains to her friend that Charlie “distinguished himself” above the other students during the exams, answering questions “that would have puzzled older heads, with the greatest facility” (Webb 157), in much the same way that he confounded the Thomases’ dinner guests. Mr. Whateley’s view of Charlie’s exclusive education parrots that of Mrs. Thomas. He asks, “what benefit accrue to the lad from an education beyond his station? He cannot enter into any one of the learned professions; both whilst he [attends the exclusive school], and after his education is finished, he will be like a fish out of water” (158). His opinion, like that of Mrs. Thomas, is rooted in a “major theme pervading nineteenth-century discourse on the slave issue.” It was “the capacity of free black people to assimilate into the dominant society by entering trades and the learned professions” (Boime 79). *The Garies* as a literary publication by an African American writer answers this query. The text responds in the character of Mr. Walters and in the depiction of Black Nationalism.

Though racist directors block Mrs. Bird’s attempts to enroll the child in a school that matches his talent, ironically the sons of the staunchest opponent support the child’s admission. The boys illustrate that objections to Charlie are “feeble prejudices, unsustained by reason right” (“The Mixed School Question” 443). They “have better

hearts than their parents” (Webb 249). Thus, through Webb’s paradigm, children will lead efforts to promote racial equality.

Mrs. Bird’s efforts to educate Charlie reveal another path to mixed populations, introspection. Her friend, Mr. Whateley explains,

It is frequently the case, that we are urged by circumstances to the advocacy of a measure in which we take but little interest, and of the propriety of which we are often very skeptical; but so surely, as it is just in itself, in our endeavors to convert others we convince ourselves; and, from lukewarm apologists, we become earnest advocates. (Webb 240-241)

Mr. Whateley, having witnessed the folly of Charlie’s exclusion, realizes his own bigotry. Despite exclusion from the Warmouth school, Charlie’s education continues at a Sabbath School. Through the Philadelphia school, the exclusive Warmouth school, and the Sabbath school, *The Garies* advocates education by any means. However, in anticipation of “objections from the scholars,” race informs the school’s seating. Black students sit on a separate “backless bench, in an obscure corner of the room” apart from their white classmates (Webb 251). The seating arrangement is twofold in that it provides the setting to enact Webb’s “mixed school” argument. He writes:

The boy or girl, who has been out-stripped by his coloured classmate at school, learns his rival’s true worth as well as his own, and the respect he is taught then is not forgotten during lifetime. He sees beneath the coloured skin, that repels perhaps another, the merit that excited his boyish rivalry and respect. (“The Mixed School Question” 444)

In the Sabbath School, Charlie models the student whom Webb proposes in this passage.

The child's acumen exceeds his classmates' and earns respect of adoring adults.

As instruction begins, *The Garies* pauses to rewrite a scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* where young George Shelby teaches Uncle Tom to write the alphabet.

Not that way, Uncle Tom, -- not that way, said he, briskly, as Uncle Tom laboriously brought up the tail of his *g* the wrong side out; 'that makes a *q*, you see.' 'La sakes, now, does it?' said Uncle Tom, looking with a respectful, admiring air, as his young teacher flourishingly scrawled *q*'s and *g*'s innumerable for his edification. (*UTC* 18)

At the Sabbath School, Miss Cass<sup>56</sup> experiences similar results when she attempts to teach the alphabet to Aunt Comfort, a "black, good-humored," beloved institution of the community whose name symbolizes her service to others. Through punning, her characterization shifts from symbol to gesture and tone. Webb writes,

They got on charmingly until after crossing over the letter O, as a matter of course they came to P and Q. 'Look here,' said Aunt Comfort, with a look of profound erudition, 'here's anoder O. What's de use of having two of 'em? ... what's de use of saying dat's a Q, when you jest said not a minute ago 'twas O? ... I isn't gwine to b'lieve dat dat ar little speck makes all de difference -- no such thing, case it don't -- deys either both O's or both Q's. I'm clar o dat. (Webb 252)

Both Uncle Tom and Aunt Comfort struggle to recognize subtle distinctions among the letters. But while Tom accepts and praises instruction from the young George Shelby,

---

<sup>56</sup> This is another instance of Webb's language play in naming patterns. He references Sabbath School through punning of Comfort and alliteration of Cass with class. Note that Comfort's perception of the alphabet "clashes" with that of Cass.

Comfort analyzes the alphabet with child-like simplicity and candor. She challenges Miss Cass. Comfort's self-confidence doubles as self-possession. "Miss Cass," she cautions, "you isn't gwine to fool me dat ar way. I knows you of old honey – you's up to dese 'ere things, and I isn't gwine to b'lieve dat dat ar little speck makes all the difference" (252). Challenging both instruction and instructor, Comfort is quite comfortable with her world view. Her unique brand of humor precludes Charlie's arrival.

His first day of instruction occasions mischief which conjures Topsy's confession to Ophelia. When Ophelia demands Topsy's confession to theft, the child invents additional crimes, rationalizing that she is satisfying Ophelia's demands for a *full* confession (*UTC* 213). Similarly, Charlie stumbles through spelling "with great gravity and slowness" (Webb 253) in order to satisfy Miss Cass's presumptions of illiteracy. Miss Cass in turn correlates the poor spelling with racial assumptions "You spell quite nicely, particularly for a little coloured boy." He fulfills her expectations, but betrays the feigned literacy shortly afterwards with quick, accurate answers to reading-based questions. It moves Miss Cass to ask, "Why didn't you tell me [that you could read] before?" (253). His reply turns on simple logic, "Because you did not ask me." During the colloquy with Cass, a merry twinkle in Charlie's eye and a suppressed grin mark the child's mischief and mimic Topsy's gestures.

Aunt Comfort highlights the child's talents with more humor. She queries Charlie as he answers the superintendent's questions, and she mistakenly assumes that the child's responses to the superintendent are intended for her. Charlie demonstrates an ability to

maintain focus even as Comfort questions him simultaneously. His quick answers to the superintendent double as responses that confound and confuse Comfort in the following abbreviated exchange.

“... where did you learn all dat?”

... “Across the Red Sea.”

“Is dere many more of ‘em like you?”

“*Immense Hosts.*”

“Did I ever – jis’ hear dat, dere’s ‘mense hostes’ of ‘em jest like him! ... Is dey all .....dere yet, honey?”

“They were all drowned”

“Oh Lordy, Lordy ... and how did you ‘scape ... from drowning ‘long wid the rest of ‘em?”

“Why I wasn’t there; it was thousands of years ago.”

“Look here, What do you mean?” she whispered; “didn’t you say jest now dat you went to school wid ‘em?” (Webb 254)

Aunt Comfort’s humor results from misunderstanding Charlie’s answers to the superintendent as answers to her questions. The narrative captures her “interest in Charlie’s success” and her protection of the child with two words, “she whispered.” So as not to disclose his mistake to others, she privately corrects him. Ironically, it is she who has erred. Comfort expresses pride in malapropism, “I likes children – especially children of colour – have *expiring* [inquiring] minds” (255). It moves the child to such

laughter that Aunt Comfort chides him with a private admonitory pinch in his back. She exhibits amazement, pride, and love instead of Rachel's vicious contempt.

Charlie's preparation for catechism resumes and revises Topsy's instruction. Stowe writes that "Topsy had an uncommon verbal memory, and committed with a fluency that greatly encouraged her mistress." However when the slave child begins recitations, the catechism becomes an opportunity for a joke. "Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state wherein they were created ... Please, Missis, was dat ar state Kintuck? ... Dat state dey fell out of ..." (*UTC* 217, 218). Though Topsy's recitation indicates learning through memorization, the manner in which she becomes completely literate remains a mystery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We are told that "Miss Ophelia took Topsy home to Vermont with her" where upon reaching womanhood, "Topsy was baptized and became a member of the church" (377), – all in preparation to send the former slave as a missionary to Africa. Subversively, she participates in nineteenth-century efforts to expatriate educated and troublesome African Americans to Liberia.

Charlie's religious instruction and examinations lead up to the catechism. His aptness earns him a place among white scholars who are to be catechized into the white church. The "addition of a black lamb to the flock" enacts Webb's mixed-school. The narrative captures the event through Aunt Comfort's humor. Being the only "coloured person who attended [the church] regularly" (Webb 255), Comfort leaves her customary seat by the organ and "plants herself" in the gallery where she "remained almost



speechless with wonder and astonishment” (256). When Charlie disremembers the Lord’s Prayer, Comfort blurts, “I’ll give yer a start – ‘Out Farrer.’” Immediately realizing that she had “spoken out in meeting,” Comfort “sank behind a pew door, completely extinguished” (256). Webb’s prescription for Charlie’s Warmouth success lies in a network of support – Mrs. Bird’s advocacy, and Aunt Comfort’s private whisper, her loving pinch, and her impromptu prompting.

### Minstrel Redux

Through dialogue, performance, idiom, and mimesis, *The Garies* signifies on the black-faced minstrel tradition. Charlie engages Mrs. Thomas in an end-man / interlocutor exchange after exposing her pretensions. While Charlie is in service, neighborhood kids pelt him with minstrel-inspired insults. And as Charlie recuperates from illness, his friend Kinch performs a version of the minstrel “locomotive.” Webb’s first masterful sleight of hand on minstrelsy is the “pig in a poke,” the gift of an actual piglet in a sack. It is Kinch’s parting gift to Charlie. Kinch explains that in Charlie’s new country home, he [Charlie] can raise the pig and sell it at a profit. It is a fanciful idea based on good intentions and capitalism.

Kinch’s gift poses an enigma in that a pig seems misplaced among the Philadelphian plot, characters, and setting. Aside from the obvious, the “pig in a poke” is also an idiomatic expression for a surprise. Indeed the creature surprises Caddy. On the other hand, the nineteenth-century North hosted a cultural phenomenon, the minstrel

show, where a black faced minstrel walks on stage carrying a miniature of himself in a sack. While singing lyrics about a surprise, he opens the bag and surprises the audience with the miniature. It is an instant hit. The fact that enslaved children were ranked with pigs (Douglass *Narrative* 39) diminishes the spectacle to insult. Webb parrots the minstrel scene with a literal reinterpretation of the idiom. Through Kinch's gift, Webb parodies minstrel performance by reducing the foundational idiom from a stage joke to its denotative meaning. This narrative gesture reclaims the black child from the stage as a comedic prop and resituates him/her as a fledgling entrepreneur.

Minstrelsy continues with George Stevens, whose racist affronts unveil an assertive Kinch. Stevens greets Kinch as Other while reducing the DeYounge business to folly, "Well Snowball ... how do you keep this curiosity-shop?" Kinch, retorts, "My name is not Snowball and this ain't a curiosity-shop ... Do you want to buy anything?" (Webb 189). Kinch corrects Steven's bigoted gaze and racist nomenclature in Standard American English; he corrects Steven's insult in black dialect; and he returns to Standard American English to redirect the conversation from offensive posturing to commercial exchange. He trumps Steven's bigotry with selfhood while asserting racial blackness through dialect. In doing so, he asserts control of the conversation, situation, and transaction. The young man's education, the economic stability of his father's store, and his communal bonds reinforce his position. Supply and demand also place Kinch at a market advantage. He has what Stevens needs. Webb enacts racial justice in the

DeYounge used clothing store where the empowered Kinch reduces Stevens from a cynical bigot to a needy consumer. Kinch is the young counterpart of Mr. Walters.

Stevens is Webb's minstrel remake. The metamorphosis begins with a "very dilapidated coat, of drab colour, and peculiar cut,"<sup>57</sup> old trousers, and an old hat (Webb 190). Ironically, and unbeknownst to Stevens, the old clothing misrepresents him as a gang member and immediately draws rival violence. The rival gang coats his face and hands with blackening tar. They also deliver a "heavy blow in the mouth which cut his lips" causing swelling "to the size that would have been regarded as large even on the face of a Congo negro and one eye was puffed out to an alarming extent" (Webb 194, 195). The resulting distorted eyes and mouth set on his blackened face mimics minstrel exaggerations. Attempts to artificially whiten him with lime fail, making his "transformation back to white was more painful than for most minstrels, as well as less complete" (Nowatzki 50). During the assault, Stevens' hat "lost its tip and half the brim," adding a more minstrel nuance with his old clothing. The transformation meets gang approbation. They admire their handiwork in racial slur, "Oh! don't he look like a nigger!" (Webb 194). Although Stevens purchases the DeYounge's used clothing in order to disguise villainy, his purchase initiates a black-faced minstrel transformation befitting any stage.

The transformation continues with parody. Drunken young men confirm the metamorphosis by addressing Stevens in minstrel parlance, "Hallo! here's a darkey! ...

---

<sup>57</sup> Historian John Runcie notes "black masks and shabby coats" among disguises of white nineteenth-century Philadelphian rioters (Runcie qtd in Bean, Hatch, and McNamara 17).

Ha, ha! Here's a darkey—now for some fun!” And indeed the narrative literally burlesques Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as would a minstrel show. “Spirit of—hic—hic—night, whence co-co-comest thou? ... sp-p-eak—art thou a creature of the mag-mag-nation-goblin-damned, or only a nigger?—speak!”(Webb 195).<sup>58</sup> From behind the minstrel mask, the oppressor experiences oppression first-hand, and the villain falls prey to his own dissembling. Webb's artistry, turning on the absurd, literally “thumbs its nose” at Stowe's minstrel caricatures as it asserts her rationale “there's no arguing with pictures” (Wilson 260).

### Conclusion

Harriet Beecher Stowe's introduction to *The Garies* voices concerns about self-possession among free blacks in Philadelphia. “Are the race at present held as slaves capable of freedom, self-government, and progress?” (Preface). Her remarks beg to ask if she had completely forgotten her acquaintances with “living example[s] of the possibilities of the Negro race,” Mr. Frank J. and Mrs. Mary Webb, as well as Frederick Douglass (40). Or did she consider Webb's novel as an exemplar of African American progress? More pressing, did she read *The Garies* before writing the preface? As a review concludes, Stowe's concerns are “bosh” and “nonsense” (*London Daily News* qtd. in Otter 228). *The Garies* depicts African American families who repeatedly reject Stowe's concerns.

---

<sup>58</sup> Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. 1.1.52, 1.4.40.

Webb's text foregrounds exceptional African American children who will rise socioeconomically and, from that position, elevate others. This model deeply contrasts Stowe's proposition for black children. Through Topsy, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* argues that black children are inferior, heathenish indestructible creatures who must be converted into civility through Christianization. Topsy's conversion from wickedness required a miraculous, angelic "laying on of hands." Stowe's remaining representations of black children render them enslaved intellectually and socially as well as religiously and politically. They are children who thrive in bondage.

*The Garies* responds to characterizations in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through black children and childhood in the free North by replacing blissfully ignorant or dangerously angry slave children with exceptional but plausible self-possessed learners. Throughout the novel, black children are consistently in some phase of schooling. We notice that education enhances and expands a bright young mind like that of Charlie Ellis. He is Webb's response to the ignorant, shiftless, unruly slave children depicted by Stowe. The child's pranks are not borne out of performance or anger but out of desperation to reclaim selfhood. Kinch, returning aggression with aggression, is Webb's wicked child. He is the young prototype of Mr. Walters and possibly David Walker. Yet his actions, like Charlie's, are governed by a desire to maintain a sense of wholeness.

The novel explores education versus servitude dialectics through Charlie, Mrs. Thomas, and Mr. Walters. Hegemonic thought, modeled by Mrs. Thomas, marginalizes prospects for a black child's future to menial employment such as hired service.

Anything other than a rudimentary education is useless. But Mr. Walters, a black millionaire, refutes those claims on grounds that hired service is a Northern form of bondage that fosters dependency on paternalism or benevolence. He argues that education is essential to a black child's personal and economic independence. W. E. B. DuBois would later write that education "must strengthen the Negro's character, increase his knowledge, and teach him to earn a living" (57). Through these dialectics, Webb joins "Mid-nineteenth century African American authors [who] integrated the "is" with "what might be" in order ... to validate to validate African American self-possession in the court of public opinion" (Stockton 475). Scholars have linked self-possession with marriage and property ownership (475) or "whiteness," manners, and dress (Nowatzki 36). Frank J. Webb adds education to that list and illustrates his premise through Charlie Ellis and Kinch DeYounge.

Webb's literacy model transcends class and race. The text of *The Garies* promotes literacy most prominently through Charlie's education. From the urban Philadelphian school to the rural Sabbath School, the narrative illustrates that smart black children can and will learn in any situation, and that "human education is not simply a matter of schools; it is much more a matter of family and group life – the training of one's home, of one's daily companions, of one's social class" ( 61). Charlie's home symbolizes the center of culture. His most notable companion, Kinch, teaches the basics of rascality, but equally important are Charlie's benefactor, Mrs. Bird who backs

philanthropy with advocacy, and Aunt Comfort whose loving praise redeems Aunt Rachel's vicious malice.

Webb also promotes literary as a function of the novel. Numerous instances of repetition, allusion, and direct references appear within the text. For example, Webb repeats many character names and alludes to characterizations and events found in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, motivating the reader to consult the latter for comparisons. *The Garies* further nudges readers to seek a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*, Chaucer's poetry, or the Bible for extended reading. The text invites readers to participate in polite bantering among the characters and research the etymology of "salad" or to examine nineteenth-century cultural phenomena.

*The Garies* presents play as a facet of childhood, a liberating form, not as a consequence of shiftlessness. The boys' are easily drawn into their favorite pastime, an intense game of marbles, but play is balanced with industriousness. Charlie loves school and learning. Kinch helps to operate his father's used clothing store, and he has savvy business acumen. But when Charlie becomes a hired servant, play quickly evolves to rascality, revealing the boys' clever wit, hilarious ingenuity and self-determination. Charlie, determined to become fired from service, executes a series of pranks which turn his employer's household topsy-turvy. His mischief conjures images of Sam, Andy, and the Shelby plantation children who disparage the slave trader with obnoxious antics. Unlike Stowe's characters who function as both creators and butts of humor, Charlie and Kinch confound oppression with comic mayhem shifting the joke onto their would-be

oppressors. The children make jest of characters who feign antebellum gentility while exposing their pretentious natures. Webb's plausible characterizations illuminate the racial stereotypes inherent in *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* slave children. As such, *The Garies* is an excellent companion text for Stowe's novel.

Using Charlie's experiences, the novel consistently rejects service for black children. His trials suggest that service leaves children vulnerable to violence and abuse, even in the free North. Though Webb amends Charlie's situation with Brer Rabbit style humor, wit, and guile, the author presents children in hired service from another perspective – an unnamed white child from a charity house, who sleeps in a garret, and who experiences arbitrary abuse from her employer. Little else is known, but the child's fragmented history appropriately launches the cold, cruel, brutality of indentured service and African American children in Chapter Three and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*.



## CHAPTER IV

### SERVITUDE'S CRUELITIES IN HARRIET WILSON'S *OUR NIG*

#### Introduction and Background

This chapter argues that Frado Smith, the child protagonist in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story House, North. Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There.* by "Our Nig" (1859), is a rejection of Harriet Beecher Stowe's black child depictions in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and an extension of Webb's dialectics on Northern servitude. Where slavery's role in the family breakup buttresses Stowe's abolitionist thrust, Wilson expands causes of the broken families to poverty and racial hatred. Her narrative questions the veracity of Stowe's Ophelia/Topsy adoption paradigm as it reveals hypocrisy secreted in Northern abolitionism. From first person narration and from a child's perspective *Our Nig* relates a tale of orphanage and Northern bondage.

Harriet Wilson, born in 1808, would have been approximately twenty-four years old<sup>59</sup> when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared serially, in 1851-1852. This would have been a time when, just a few years removed from indentured servitude, she would have been preoccupied with her own failing health, marriage, abandonment, self-sustenance, and

---

<sup>59</sup> According to the Chronology which follows *Our Nig*, Henry Louis Gates estimates Harriet Wilson's to be "22 years old at the time of August 24, 1850 census, found at Milford Town Clerk's office," (xiii) Milford, New Hampshire.

motherhood all in short order. Wilson found refuge in reading; and given the market saturation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the form of newspapers, serials, novels, dramatic adaptations, as well as the contemporary cultural saturation of "Tomitudes,"<sup>60</sup> (playing cards, games, dolls, and other paraphernalia), it is highly likely that she may have either chanced upon an installment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or experienced the novel through the popularity of its cultural artifacts. Certainly, it would have been difficult for her to escape the "Tom" mania. What is known is that six years after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and two years after *The Garies and Their Friends*, Wilson published *Our Nig*. Research indicates that "one hundred and fifty copies of [*Our Nig*] were made available for sale on September 5, 1859" (Nagill 335).

*Our Nig's* structure incorporates the slave narrative. The novel begins with Mag Smith's decision to abandon her six or seven-year-old daughter, Alfrado (Frado). Mag leaves Alfrado with a known cruel woman, Mrs. Bellmont, and an uncertain future. Rather than accept the child in accordance with the "spontaneous goodness and benevolence of man's original instincts" (Nagill 176), Mrs. Bellmont appraises Frado as potential free labor and accepts the child as an indentured servant.

Wilson's style of slave narration shifts from third to first person, assimilating readers in the protagonist's subject position and creating a shared experience. She provides few comic interludes to balance horror. Her humor reaffirms selfhood and black childhood. Wilson's experience related in first person ideally suits the slave narrative

---

<sup>60</sup> *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. Harriet Beecher Stowe Center online.

structure. As with the narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, she claims exclusive ownership to both text and experience in the title, “by ‘*Our Nig*’.”, thereby refuting any presumption that she used an amanuensis. Making no professions to lofty literary ideals, Wilson prefaces the narrative with a confession of “her inability to minister to the refined and cultivated” (Preface). In comparison to Douglass’s rhetorical strategies (chiasmus for example), Wilson’s style is plain, Puritanical. Her stated purpose for writing the novel is: “Deserted by kindred, disabled by failing health, I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life” (Preface). And like the authors of the slave narratives, she notes intent to expose slavery’s influence, not in the South but the North. Within the novel, each chapter of *Our Nig* begins with an epigram, followed by elements of the slave narrative from circumstances of birth, enslavement, and freedom, to an attempt to forge a new life beyond bondage. The novel closes with an appendix of authenticating documents.

*Our Nig* departs from the slave narrative in that the author loosely couches autobiography in fiction. Her twofold reasons for this structural blend appear in the preface, “I do not pretend to divulge every transaction in my own life, which the unprejudiced would declare unfavorable in comparison with the treatment of legal bondmen.” Her notation here is to draw attention to the absence of a legal bond to the Belmont family. Unlike servants legally bonded into indenture, Wilson was under no contractual arrangements. The implication is that her experience in indentured service

was not necessarily universal. Her self-censorship also raises questions about the nature of those unspeakable transactions in her life, particularly events with which legal bondmen may have taken exception.

Wilson deepens mystery by adding, “I have purposely omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home” (Preface). Although she was not a slave by law, she was a slave by design. Wilson’s targeted audience would have also included readers familiar Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a novel “which appealed to the hearts of Christians everywhere” (Ross 176). Compared to Stowe’s mythic treatment of Southern slaves, audiences could have found Wilson’s tale of Northern indenture far-fetched, perhaps unbelievable. Therefore she took into consideration the narrative’s volatility and its potential damaging effects on abolitionism. Wilson may have also been concerned that embarrassing news of her slave-imposter husband, Samuel Wilson, would have diminished her narrative import as slave imposters were a genuine concern among the abolitionists. Frederick Douglass, for example, removed his shirt and exposed his scarred torso to an audience of skeptics in order to prove his claims of enslavement (Franchot 145). Armed with the knowledge that Wilson had (unknowingly) married a slave imposter, pro-slavery forces could have relegated Wilson’s novel to fraud as well.

More incendiary, Wilson’s tormentor, Rebecca S. Hutchinson, was a member of the abolitionist Hutchinson family; and at the time of the novel’s publication, extended family members were both wealthy and influential. Wilson did not want to incur the Hutchinson family’s wrath, nor did she want to alienate herself from other “good anti-

slavery friends at home” by exposing her tormentors. For instance, Frederick Douglass was a vehement supporter and ally of the abolitionist Hutchinson Family Singers. Public revelations that a relative of this popular group was as egregious as a Southern slave holder could have implicated the entire family by mere association, thus creating a public scandal. To circumvent this precarious situation, Wilson used fictional character names and unspecified geographic locations to conceal her abusers’ identity. Yet she signed the novel with her legal name rather than a pseudonym. This action begs to question whether Wilson subversively intended to expose the Hutchinson family, knowing that she would risk alienation, perhaps worse.

#### Abandonment

The plot of *Our Nig* begins with genealogy, seduction, and Mag, a fallen white woman. She gives birth to her first child out of wedlock, but the child dies shortly after birth. Ostracized by the community, Mag attempts to find work, but labor is scarce. Although impoverished, she will not accept assistance from old friends, but she does accept help from Jim Smith, a “kind-hearted African” (Wilson 9). Facing starvation, Mag later marries him, deepening her disgrace. The marriage produces two children, one of whom is Alfrado. After Jim’s death from consumption, Seth Shipley, his business partner, moves in with the family, becoming Mag’s African American common-law husband. “Wilson focuses not on the couple’s romance but in its economic frailty”

(Singley 124), and “the role that circumstances rather than character plays in Mag’s decision to abandon her daughter” (122).

When Seth’s business dwindles, poverty forces the family to relocate. He informs Mag that they must abandon the children in order to seek work elsewhere. She abdicates maternity and reduces her children to Topsian Otherness, snarling, “Who’ll take the black devils?”<sup>61</sup> Her epithet reflects racial attitudes with links to Southern slavery. Former slave John Jea explains that slave owners frequently told them that “they were made by and like the devil, and commonly called [them] black devils” (Jea 9). The reference suggests that Frado and her sibling are unfit for adoption. Wilson captures Mag’s disposition in bestial terms, “snarling,” and “growling,” both of which imply that Mag’s possible penchant for drink (Foreman 127) may have also influenced her attitude and decision. Seth renounces any paternity, “They’re none of mine.” The brief exchange between Mag and Seth renders Frado less as Mag’s progeny as more as encumbrance to the couple’s well-being. Unlike the slave mother, Mag’s concerns lie not with the loss of the child but with the ability to dispose of her. Mag’s justification for the child’s abandonment reveals as much about the mother as it does the child.

Neither Mag nor Seth mentions the possibility that Frado could be adopted. According to scholar Carol Singley, orphanages for black children were scarce in the early nineteenth-century (129). Historian Priscilla Ferguson Clement documents that “as late as 1910, over half the benevolent institutions for children in the United States did not

---

<sup>61</sup> Mag has “two little girls.” (Nagill 334).

admit African-Americans ... African American families [in the North] practiced informal adoption methods carried over from Africa and from slavery” (Clements 191). Frado’s mulatto complexion and her mother’s taint as a fallen woman severely limit the possibility of adoption by a white family. The mother has given birth out of wedlock, married one black man, and assumed another as a common law husband. Frado inherits Mag’s infamy threefold by falling victim to the belief that the sins of the mother are passed on to the children.<sup>62</sup> Seth suggests that Frado’s youth and beauty will facilitate adoption in that those traits will make her a “prize” (Wilson 17). His suggestion also eerily hints that he has appraised the child for her market value, and that she may be deemed a “fancy article” vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Frado displays willfulness when Seth seeks her consent to live apart from the family. The child screams “No! ... and giving a sudden jerk which destroyed Seth’s equilibrium, left him sprawling on the floor, while she escaped through the door” to a place of hiding (Wilson 19). While conduct is sufficient to convince Seth that the child “is a hard one” (19), it is insufficient proof that she is naughty or wicked. Yet the couple decides to abandon Frado on precisely those terms and to the Bellmont family where Mrs. Bellmont, a “right she-devil” known for her temper and cruelty, lives. Mag, having done odd jobs for Mrs. Bellmont, was familiar with the woman’s horrid temperament, but the couple rationalizes that Frado will fulfill Bellmont’s service needs, and Mrs. Bellmont

---

<sup>62</sup> “[T]he Bible’s Genesis and the law of *partus sequitur ventrem*, ... stipulates that the slave child follows the condition of the mother” Bassard 83).

will attend to Frado's conduct. Mag's and Seth's conclusion that Mrs. Bellmont's "severe restraints would be helpful" for the child's conduct simply assuages guilt.

#### Frado's Adoption Narrative

Having discovered Mag's ruse, her pretense that she needed temporary care for Frado, the Bellmont family weighs options for Frado's placement. Mary Bellmont recommends placing the child at the County House. Her suggestion is problematic in that "few options existed for African American children who needed homes ... asylums were not readily available for African American orphans and orphans of other racial and ethnic minorities until the late nineteenth century" (Herman qtd. in Singley 129). White orphans did not fare much better. Historian Carol J. Singley explains that many of these children were placed on orphan trains and sent to childless couples or families needing labor. Some of the children were legally adopted "but others labored in exchange for food and shelter and experienced varying degrees of abuse or neglect" (127). Even the impoverished Wilson found difficulties placing her son in clean safe care as she struggled to find work. In this context, Ophelia's adoption of Topsy appears more the exception than the rule, and that exceptionality is conditional and transient.

Through indentured service with the Bellmonts, *Our Nig* challenges the adoption schema of Northern benevolence and the African American child. Jack Bellmont suggests that the family keep Frado because "She's real handsome and bright, and not very black either." The mulatta child's "long, curly black hair, and handsome roguish



eyes [which sparkle] with an exuberance of spirit almost beyond restraint” (Wilson 17) evoke Stowe’s mulatto Harry Harris (Stowe, *UTC* 3), whose “black hair, fine as floss silk, hung in glossy curls around his dimpled face, while a pair of large dark eyes, full of fire and softness, looked out from beneath the rich long lashes” (*UTC* 3).

Characterizations of both Frado and Harry invite the readerly gaze; both elicit reader sympathies; but each depiction carries a different narrative agenda. Frado’s beauty partially gains her admittance into the Bellmont home, but that same asset increases her vulnerability as an object of desire to the men in the home. Although the danger is unspoken, it is present nonetheless. Beauty effeminizes Harry Harris, and as such, his escape as a vulnerable white female child assumes a greater import. He forms a sentimental bond with readers (Duane 202) who anxiously follow his plight.

As Mag abandons Frado to the Bellmont’s care, the narrative assigns surrogate care of the child to readers; but like the child, readers are powerless to mitigate her circumstances of indenture. Indentured service

usually involved a contract or other mutually understood arrangement that delineated the responsibilities and rights of both parties and that arrangement ended after a specific period of time, at which point the indentured individual would be free to earn his or her own living. (Galenson 97)

The child’s abandonment precludes all contractual arrangements of indentured service or adoption, leaving her as an indentured by default (Breau 456), and a slave by Mrs. Bellmont’s designs. Frado has virtually no one to protect or rescue her. Self-doubt undermines her flight considerations. “Mrs. Bellmont had always presented her as ugly.

Perhaps everyone thought her so. Then no one would take her. She was black, no one would love her” (Wilson 108). With inescapable circumstances, Frado is not only the Bellmont servant, and slave – she is their prisoner. Her situation engenders affective bonds with readers who vacillate between adopter and adoptee as they reluctantly share Frado’s pain and anxiously follow her plight.

One source of Mrs. Bellmont’s cruelty is Frado’s light complexion. The child is not “many shades” darker than young Mary Bellmont and whiteness racially approximates one to the other. In the South, enslaved racially mixed children with very light complexions were seen as an affront to sensibilities among the owning class, and attempts to racially distance these children took on many forms. The seven-year-old mulatto slave child, Lewis Clarke, was given to his white Aunt Betsey Banton who was determined to “fix [him] so that nobody should ever think [he] was white” (Clarke 23). Lewis was made to strip off all of his clothing and under the blazing sun for hours so that he would blacken from sunburn (23). Frado was “not many shades darker than Mary Bellmont... what a calamity it would be ever to hear the contrast spoken of” (Wilson 39). Mrs. Bellmont, determined to destroy any misperceived kinship between Frado and the family or any misperceptions of Frado’s race, mimics Banton’s attempts at blackening the child. “No matter how powerful the heat ... [Frado] was never permitted to shield her skin from the sun ((39).

In order to insure Frado’s racial Otherness and to distinguish the child’s social inferiority, Mrs. Bellmont defeminizes the child by cutting her curly hair. The author

further inscribes Otherness through and the protagonist's name, Alfrado. Typically, the feminine name is Alfrada, but through the masculine ending with the alphabet "o," Note that the English equivalent of Alfrado is Alfred. Clothing partially enforces Frado's Otherness. She attends school in a "winter over-dress [which was] a cast-off overcoat, once worn by Jack, and a sunbonnet," both "a great source of merriment to the scholars." The children taunt her as "Old Granny Bellmont" (Wilson 37). Her dress for religious meetings was a "coarse cloth gown and an ancient bonnet" (68, 69). Like the enslaved children of the South, Frado "wore no shoes until after frost, and snow even, appeared; and bared her feet again before the last vestige of winter disappeared" (66). But recall that Frado is living the North where winters could be brutal, and she is "illegally guarded against" weather extremes. The child's shorn head complemented with a scant garment, renders her less attractive, genderless, "anything but an enticing object" (Wilson 69). The classmates' taunts confirm Frado's clownish appearance and confirm Mrs. Bellmont's humiliating designs.

Stowe cycles Topsy through a grander schema employing similar methodology. Shortly after the narrator introduces Topsy as a little girl, the text characterizes her as the ultimate Other, a black dirty heathenish "thing" which makes Ophelia recoil in repulsion. The child's feminine deconstruction continues with a haircut. "Washed and shorn of all the little braided tails," she too appears genderless (*UTC* 211). And though a clean gown and a well-starched apron partially restore her femininity, the narrative continues to displace gender through renaming and metaphor: witch, imp, crow, monkey, pointer,

parrot, etc. The narrative goal was to create stages through which Topsy transformed from a wicked Other into a civilized, Christianized member of the community. While the child's image swings from an androgynous dancing crow on one hand to a self-proclaimed wicked demon on the other, Topsy eventually emerges as a comic indestructible Other who sanctions and invites the abuse that Frado endures.

Frado's living quarter in a separate level of the home corresponds with racial and socioeconomic inequality between the child/servant/slave and the family. The unfinished garret room deeply contrasts the "nicely furnished rooms" on the lower level of the Bellmont home. The dark, cramped, isolated room garret space evokes the imagery of prison cell and "spaces associated with slavery, namely the ship that transported Africans to America" as well as "the attic where Harriet Jacobs spends seven years before escaping to freedom" (Singley 131). Its location over the kitchen exposes Frado to heat extremes in warm weather, and "the roof slanting nearly to the floor" usurps headroom and walking space. Frado's "bed could stand only in the middle of the room" (Wilson 27). Situated at the end of an "L" shaped dark corridor, garret receives light and air from a small window. Frado's garret room is her cell or dog house.

The garret offers some insight into living conditions for children in hired service. In *The Garies*, for example, white servants assume that Charlie Ellis will live in Mrs. Bird's garret, but to their shock, she accommodates the child in a guest room. *The Garies* also indicates that a white servant girl resides in the Stevens's garret. Her location is so remote, she cannot hear Mr. Stevens's frantic knock at the front door. Frado's quarters,

replicating this remoteness, thus fulfilling Mary Bellmont's imperative, "I don't want a nigger 'round *me* ... "I don't want her near me" (Wilson 26). Despite the dark passage, ladder access, cramped quarters, and excessive heat, Mrs. Bellmont, resonating the attitudes of Mrs. Bird's servants, proclaims that garret space is "good enough for a nigger" (Wilson 26). Both *Our Nig* and *The Garies* illustrate enforcement of social hierarchies upon children in servitude through living accommodations, and through these accommodations, both novels illustrate at least one manner of dehumanization, exclusion.

Mealtime was another occasion to Other Frado. Her breakfast, "a bowl of skimmed milk, with brown bread crusts" is a Northern version of the Southern slave fare. It is similar to that of former bondswoman, Mary who recalls sparse childhood meals of "buttermilk and bread in our bowl, sometime greens, or bones" (Sterling 5). Frado was ordered to eat her scraps away from the family and in the kitchen (as would a house slave). She had to consume the meal standing and in fewer than ten minutes (Wilson 28). The emphasis on timing parallels slave children at mealtime, but the motivation differs. For Frado's Southern corollaries, speed meant more consumption, especially when several children shared a common trough or bowl: quick consumption equaled more nutrition. Frado's timed meals were not born of out necessity but the consequence of Mrs. Bellmont's racist despotism.

As the narrative progresses, James Bellmont, a sympathizing son, insists that Frado consume the same food as the rest of the family and take her meals civilly, seated at the dining room table (Wilson 68). Despite the change in her dining arrangements,

modified hierarchies remained in force. The child must wait until the Bellmont family has dined and departed the table before she can eat their leftovers. It is the same hierarchical structure that Mrs. Bird's servants attempt to impose on the child, Charlie Ellis in *The Garies*. In that case, the text makes clear that the mitigating factor is race. These same racial attitudes compounded with snobbery underscore Frado's dining arrangements with the Bellmonts.

Labor further defines Frado's social position within the Bellmont home. The child is not permitted to eat until she had completed chores. These restrictions follow the Southern adult slave model in which meals were consumed at the end of a day's field labor. Stowe enacts this model with Tom at the Legree plantation where the slaves, retiring from the fields late in the day, jostle for positions to grind corm quickly. They had a relatively short time to prepare meals, eat, and sleep before the workday began anew (*UTC* 301-302). The end of the workday could have meant late into the night, so the preparation and consumption of meals were further constrained by time. In much the same way, Mrs. Bellmont restricts Frado's mealtime. The meals serve as a type of reward for having completed chores, yet the food must be consumed hastily in order to avail the child for more work.

*Our Nig* renounces indentured service as an adoption choice and illustrates that adoption choices for children of color living in the North are few. Frado's tale is cautionary: it warns that indentured service as an option for orphaned children may present conditions that rival Southern slavery.

“I’s Mighty Wicked.” (UTC 213)

In the slave world, parents disciplined children harshly in order to protect them from more severe punishments by the owning class. Punishment from slave owners could be as arbitrary as it was severe. Frederick Douglas, citing religious slaveholders as the worst of punishers, offers Rev. Ribgy Hopkins as evidence. “Mr. Hopkins could always find some excuse for whipping a slave ... a mere look, word, or motion, -- a mistake, accident, or want of power” (*Narrative* 78, 79). Mrs. Bellmont mimics Rev. Rigby’s cruelties. “No matter what occurred or ruffled her, or from what source provocation came, real or fancied, a few blows on Nig seemed to relieve her of a portion of ill-will” (Wilson 41). From these generalities, *Our Nig* catalogues Mrs. Bellmont’s terrorization of Frado. Her repertoire includes verbal, physical, and psychological abuses including racial epithets, forceful blows and kicks, and forced isolation.

Responding to the child’s cries with more violence. Mrs. Bellmont espouses the slave mistress’s attitude, asserting that the child’s cries are “symptoms of discontent and complaining which must be ‘nipped in the bud’” (Wilson 30-31). She also embodies the slave owner by expecting Frado to “display deference and undergo verbal and physical harassment without responding” (Mintz 104). Thus when Frado explains to Mrs. Bellmonts that she is sick and cannot work faster.

Angry that [Frado] should venture a reply to her command, [Mrs. Bellmont] suddenly inflicted a blow which lay the tottering girl prostrate on the floor. Excited by so much indulgence of a dangerous passion, she seemed left to

unrestrained malice; and snatching a towel, stuffed the mouth of the sufferer, and beat her cruelly. (Wilson 82)

The scene bears a chilling resemblance to the slave mistress's violence. After having been caught trying to blacken her eyebrows as she had observed her mistress, former slave Margaret Fowler explains that the mistress:

was powerful mad and yelled: 'You black devil, I'll show you how to mock your betters.' Den she picked up a stick of stovewood and flails it against my head. I didn't know nothin' more till I come to, lyin' on de floor. I heard de mistis sat to one of de girls: 'I thought her thick skull and cap of wool could take it better than that.' (Yetman 133)

Mrs. Bellmont's cruelty is as arbitrary and as cruel as that of Rev. Rigby and Ms.

Fowler's mistress. Mrs. Bellmont's brutality is "as egregious as any found in the slave holding South" (Singley 131); it is as vicious as that of Marie and Henrique St. Clare; and it is as brutal as that of the tavern owners who brutalize Topsy. "No matter what occurred to ruffle her, or from what source provocation came, real or fancied, a few blows on Nig seemed to relieve her of a portion of ill-will" (Wilson 41). Most telling of this *illness* "was part of her favorite exercise to enter the [kitchen] noisily, vociferate orders, give a few sudden blows to quicken Frado's pace, then return to the sitting room with *such* a satisfied expression, congratulating herself upon her thorough house-keeping qualities" (Wilson 66). Wilson could have taken cues from Topsy and crafted into Mrs. Bellmont's dialogue, "T'se wicked—I is. I's mighty wicked, any how. I can't help it"



(UTC 212); and offered John Jea's version of the publican's prayer for redemption, "God be merciful to me a miserable hell-deserving sinner" (Jea 17).

Mrs. Bellmont claims the same authority to brutality as does the Southern slave holder. With a "vixen nature" licensing her brutalization, Mrs. Bellmont relieves a "portion of her ill will" on Frado. The child is her whipping-boy. Historian Norman Yetman captures this arbitrary violence through the experience of a former slave who.

When Old Missis was whippin' me, I asked her what she was whipping me for, and she said, 'Nothin', 'cause you're mine, and I can whip you if I want to.' She didn't think that I had done anything to the girl. She was just mad that day, and I was around, so she took it out on me. (Yetman303)

Old Missis and Mrs. Bellmont brutalize because they *can* and because they can do so with impunity

Wilson employs the term "nig" historically and connotatively to describe her treatment. As early as 1845, "nigger" was a term that made blackness synonymous with brutality and inhumanity. After recounting the story of a slave who was murdered for unintentionally trespassing, Frederick Douglass writes in his *Narrative*, "it was a common saying, even among little [Southern] white boys, that it was worth a half-cent to kill a 'nigger,' and a half-cent to bury one" (Douglass, *Narrative* 37). This sentiment parallels Mrs. Bellmont's insensitivity to Frado's failing health. "You know these niggers are just like black snakes; you can't kill them. If she wasn't tough she would have been killed long ago" (Wilson 89). She boasts that "There was never one of [her] girls who could do half the work ... Just think how much profit [Frado] was to us last

summer ... she did the work of two girls” (Wilson 89, 90). Frado is not only a whipping boy: she is also an instrument of free labor and increased profits.

The child’s suffering reinforces Mrs. Bellmont’s mythically monstrous depiction. We are also told that “In common parlance, Mrs. Bellmont was a *scold*, and a thorough one” (Wilson 3). The narrator explains that to act in opposition to Mrs. Bellmont’s wishes “would be like encountering a whirlwind charged with fire, daggers, and spikes ... She was self-willed, haughty, undisciplined, arbitrary and severe” (Wilson 25). As such her depiction brings to mind the abusive wife in Washington Irving’s “The Devil and Tom Walker” (1824). Tom’s wife was a “termagant, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm” (Irving learner.org) who was not afraid to bargain with or fight the devil. Irving writes, “... a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil,” but the last image of Tom’s wife is her checkered apron containing a heart and a liver, presumably hers. While death conquers Mrs. Tom Walker, Frado considers poisoning Mrs. Bellmont in order to cleanse the home of wickedness, but “an overruling Providence” restrains her (Wilson 109).

Even after death, Mrs. Bellmont exercised indirect control of Frado. Scholar Barbara A. White documents that Mrs. Bellmont in reality was inspired by Rebecca S. Hutchinson Hayward, a member of the Hutchinson family, an abolitionist singing group. Rebecca’s surviving sister, Betsey Hayward Hutchinson and spouse, Jonas, “were rich and powerful allies with the she-devil” who had abolitionists connections (White, “Our Nig and the She-Devil” 23, 40). Thus as White concludes, Wilson had to disguise her

autobiography through fiction so as not to incite anger from Mrs. Bellmont's survivors and allies. The danger was that "the Hutchinson Family Singers knew most of the abolitionist leaders [and] were considered a huge success in raising consciousness" (White "Our Nig and the She-Devil" 35). Among the group's staunchest supports was Frederick Douglass who in a letter to John Hutchinson wrote, "I especially have reason to feel a grateful interest in the whole Hutchinson Family – for you have sung the yokes from the necks and the fetters from the limbs of my race" (Douglass qtd. in White "Our Nig and the She-Devil" 35). Since Wilson's abuse appears to have been a well-kept family secret, exposure of Mrs. Bellmont as "wholly imbued with Southern principles (Wilson Preface) especially those principles most loathsome, would have would have been difficult to prove. Wilson, the author, may have encountered difficulty in proving her claims, especially to allies such as Douglass. In abolitionist circles, her allegations could have been dismissed as the product of an embittered, impoverished spurned woman. Given her failing health and personal circumstances, the challenge of supporting her claims would have been daunting. The risk of alienating those antislavery members from whom she sought assistance and support was too great. Yet, she signs the novel with her legal name. Perhaps she was exercising more than and claim to ownership of the text. Perhaps, she was subversively authenticating her own experience.

Although, *Our Nig* parallels Mrs. Bellmont's cruelty with that of Southern slaveholders, it is entirely possible that she inherited violence from an abusive father. Mrs. Bellmont was in reality Rebecca S. Hutchinson Hayward, whose "father may have

been a child beater ... if [she] received some of her father's 'serious whippings,' she may have felt all the more entitled to beat her servant" (White, "Our Nig and the She-Devil" 29). Further evidence which supports Mrs. Bellmont's temperament documents "Rebecca Hayward [having] trouble living in the some house with others" (White, "Our Nig and the She-Devil" 31). As I argue later in this chapter, transactions which the author "purposely omitted" may have also driven the good woman's rage.

### The Mule of the World<sup>63</sup>

Frado is Mrs. Bellmont's likely solution not only because the child is free labor for the family; but equally important, free African American labor. When Mary boasts *our nig, our nig*, she is boasting of exclusivity to a vanishing labor force. As the Bellmont family contemplates Frado's future, young Mary Bellmont expresses contempt for the child. "She'll be of no use at all these three years, right under foot all the time" (Wilson 25). Jack retorts, "Poh, Miss Mary; if she should stay, it wouldn't be two days before you would be telling the girls about *our nig, our nig!*" (25-26). Art critic, Elizabeth L. O'Leary explains that in New York for instance, African Americans held most of the domestic service positions, but were displaced by Irish workers. At one point, African-American New Yorkers were outnumbered by the Irish ten to one. In the wake of this demographic shift, "Many northern families expressed a preference for African American employees" because black servants "were perceived as more

---

<sup>63</sup> "The [black] woman is the mule of the world" (Hurstons 14).

submissive than the turbulent, inconstant Irish” (O’Leary130-131). In fact, Mrs. Bellmont laments of having so much trouble with the girls she hires, reconfirming Mag’s allegation that the she-devil cannot keep a girl in the house for over a week (Wilson 26,18). Frado arrives coincides with Mrs. Bellmont’s need for additional labor; and her free labor and young age are both unexpected bonuses.

Mrs. Bellmont perceives Frado as a creature of endurance who can be trained up according to the Bellmont demands. Her designs are more racially motivated. She says, “I don’t mind the nigger in the child ... I should like a dozen better than one ... If I could make her do my work in a few years, I would keep her” (Wilson 26). In the nineteenth century, “not only was *nigger* work synonymous with hard, drudging labor but to *nigger* it meant ‘to do hard work,’ or ‘to slave’” (Santamarina 69). These stereotypes recalibrate Bellmont’s racist sensibilities while justifying her cruelty.

Mrs. Bellmont also envisions Frado as an opportunity in which to imprint the blind obedience. The woman balances frustration at her inability to retain hired girls with the possibilities that Frado represents. Mrs. Bellmont casually remarks, “I am almost persuaded that if I have one to train up in my way from a child, I shall be able to keep them awhile” (26). From this perspective, the term “nigger,” as Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* explains, ascribes to perpetual ignorance – the blank slate. Douglass explains that when Mr. Auld scolds his wife, Sophia, for teaching the young Frederick to read, his justification is, “A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told” (44). Mrs. Bellmont attempts to forge that same blind obedience in Frado through

brutality. “She wants nothing less than to reduce her spirited servant to an automaton ... a ... submissive machine” (Stern 448). In keeping with slave owner mentality, “Mrs. Bellmont wants to reduce Frado to the point where she cannot think or feel” (Davis 400). Rather than give the child “a good orthodox New England bringing up” Mrs. Bellmont’s ambitions are to train Frado up by breaking her down and molding her into a workhorse. Through Mrs. Bellmont’s designs for the child, the author illustrates “slavery’s appurtenances North” (Wilson Preface).

Frado is the mule upon whom Mrs. Bellmont can saddle inhuman expectations. Typically young girls who entered service “had to labor for long hours, from 4:30 A.M., until 10:00 P.M. at night” (Clement 144). Their tasks included tending children, cooking, sewing, and washing in homes with few utilities (144). ). Typically young girls who entered service “had to labor for long hours, from 4:30 A.M., until 10:00 P.M. at night” (Clement 144). Their tasks included tending children, cooking, sewing, and washing in homes with few utilities (144). Frado’s burdens, however, rival those of the Southern slave. ). At age six, her chores included feeding hens, driving cows and sheep to and from pasture, washing dishes for all the family meals, bringing in wood chips, running hither and thither from room to room, and to “always be in waiting” for Mrs. Bellmont (Wilson 29). Her chores parallel child slave labor catalogued in Maria Jenkins Schwartz’s *Born in Bondage* (2000). Schwartz writes, “Both boys and girls drove the master’s cows to pasture, fed his chickens, and gathered eggs. They fetched water and wood for the mistress from the spring or well for use in cooking, cleaning, laundering,

bathing, and gardening” (108). As the passage indicates, labor was divided among boys and girls. Conversely, Alfrado performs chores of both boys and girls. Recall that Mag was aware of Mr. Bellmont’s desire “to hire a boy to work for him, but she [couldn’t] find one that would live in the house with [the she-devil]” (Wilson 18). Her work routine, being able to “adapt herself to all departments – man, boy, housekeeper, domestic, etc.” (Wilson 116). Frado is the Bellmont mule.

Mrs. Bellmont’s expectations of Frado were consistent with those of slave owners. “At puberty [a slave child] was doing the work of a woman, and a woman’s work was scarcely distinguishable from a man’s” (Sterling 13). But at age nine, Frado was doing “as much work as a woman” (Wilson 44). The routine increased to milking cows, tending sheep, waiting the table, and taking care of the sickly James at night. By comparison, Mary, a former bondswoman, recalls becoming a “house girl” at age nine whose duties included general housework and waiting on the mistress (Sterling 7). Alongside Mary’s responsibilities, Frado’s were excessive. By the time Frado reached age fourteen, she had been assigned all of the common household duties in addition to the farm labor. Like the field slave, she labored “from early dawn until after all were retired” (Wilson 65), and she is yet a child, and a free one.

Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857) offers plausible support for such labors and expectations. In his novel, the white servant Alfred mistakes the black child Charlie Ellis for a new sub-servant and immediately devises an expansive work routine: “to clean the boots, run on errands, drive up the cows, and do other little chores.”

Alfred also explains the import of the epithet “our nig” and reconfirms the preference for African American labor. He boasts, “I’m glad he’s a black boy, I can order him round more ... than if he was white, and he won’t get his back up half as often either” (Webb 150). Alfred privately considers unloading his personal labor on the child. In effect, the adult servant views the black child as a mule.

### A Monstrous Mistress

*Our Nig* allegorically revises the Cinderella fairy tale<sup>64</sup> of the “wicked mother and equally wicked daughter” (Gates, Introduction xxvii). Cinderella’s orphanage resulted from her mother’s death, but Wilson’s orphanage results from abandonment. Unlike the promises of love and protection from Cinderella’s dying mother, Mag abruptly abandons her daughter without ceremony, parting words, promises, or protection. And because Mag never reappears, she is symbolically dead. In the fairy tale, the widowed father remarries a woman with beautiful daughters. The mother and daughters, like Mrs. Bellmont and Mary, have “hard, selfish, arrogant hearts” (Pullman 116). More compelling, the sisters do not want Cinderella to share space with them in the parlor; they force her to eat bread in the kitchen, and they clothe her in a shabby dress and wooden shoes. The child sleeps not in a bed but on the fireplace hearth. This of course parallels Frado’s banishment from the Bellmont parlor, her meal of skimmed milk and bread that

---

<sup>64</sup> I follow Phillip Pullman’s interpretation of the tale in *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm: A New English Version*.



she must eat in the kitchen, and her scant clothing. Frado's bed barely fits into an unfinished attic space.

The fairy tale also parallels Frado's circumstances through labor, cruelty, and uncleanliness. Cinderella "was made to work like a slave from morning till night" with chores such as: "carry water, clean fireplaces, cook food and wash dishes" (Pullman 116, 117). The step-sisters mock Cinderella and make fun of her to their silly friends much in the same way that Mary Bellmont attempts to influence Frado's classmates. The step-sisters further "indulged their vixen nature" by scattering dried peas in the fireplace ashes for Cinderella to pick out one by one, as a measure of punishment and as a measure of cruelty. Her father, like Mr. Bellmont (Frado's surrogate father), intervenes little, if any. Not allowed to keep herself clean, Cinderella's skin soils and blackens from the fireplace soot and ashes. The stepmother offensively refers to the child as a slattern, someone whose uncleanliness is either physical or moral. Frado, having inherited her mother's infamy, is blackened with moral uncleanliness. When Cinderella seeks spiritual deliverance from her circumstances, she appeals to nature, summoning the birds for help (Pullman 118). It is the mother's spirit, however, that guides nature to assist and protect the child. Frado receives nothing from the spiritual realm. To her, religion "was all for white people" (Wilson 84).

An 1856 *Harper's* cartoon titled, "Miss Dinah Crow," captures Frado's melancholy. Art critic Elizabeth O' Leary suggests Stowe's Topsy as an inspiration for the adolescent girl. O' Leary compares Miss Crow's "sidelong glance" to Topsy's

narrative depiction (O' Leary 103), but the child's glance does not suggest Topsy's furtiveness. Unlike Topsy, the young girl wears "a nice gown and beads" (O'Leary 102). The child's dress belies the enslavement symbolized by Topsy's plain shirt and apron, and her long black curly tresses negate Topsy's sundry braids. Miss Dinah Crow's posture with folded hands suggests a subtle gentility absent in Topsy. More persuasively, the image conveys a racially darkened Frado Bellmont. As servants were not permitted to sit in the presence of owners/employers, the child squats by the fireplace, barely grasping the bellows. Her face expresses Frado's sadness, resignation even. The artist is unknown, and his or her actual model remains a mystery.

At the end of her servitude, Frado leaves the Bellmonts with one decent dress, a Bible from Susan, and a silver half-dollar (Wilson 117). Her Prince Charming is actually a slave imposter, Samuel Adams. The openings pages of *Our Nig* offer some direction into her romance with Adams. First, I note that at the time of her abandonment, Frado was too young to have knowledge of or remember her mother's (Mag Smith's) history. Yet the opening chapter of the novel relates in substantial detail the circumstances of Mag's first romance and fall from grace. It begs to question the source of Wilson's material. Even though the narrative proper is chiefly autobiographical, albeit masked in fiction, to attribute this segment of the novel to the author's imagination would be completely out of sync with the remaining details. The first chapter offers, then, is a suggestion of Frado's first love. After freedom from twelve grueling years with the

Bellmont family, Samuel Adams may have appeared to Frado as a Prince Charming, the refreshing face of a new and better life.

Mag's story then is Frado's story. Wilson writes that as Mag (Frado) merged into womanhood, unprotected, uncherished, and uncared for" she surrendered her virginity to a "charmer" who "proudly garnered [his conquest] as a trophy." Recall that Seth predicted that the attractive Frado would be a prize somewhere. Sam fulfills the prediction and reenacts the balance of Mag's tale. Like Mag's first suitor, the would-be prince abandons Frado after marriage. She gives birth to their son, George Mason, in an institution where the "conditions were apparently horrid" (Gates, Introduction xxiv). In the Appendix, Allida writes that Samuel rescues mother and child, takes her "to some town in New Hampshire" and supports her "decently well," but suddenly and unexpectedly disappears again. "After a long desertion" he dies of yellow fever in New Orleans (Wilson 128). Unlike the fairy tale version of Cinderella, Frado's virtue goes unrewarded. There is no "happily ever after," only more victimization.

Although George Mason lives apart from his mother at a county farm where conditions were nearly unlivable, Frado does not abandon the child. Using what resources she had, Frado resituates the child in better circumstances. She "took him from that place, and now he has a home where he is contented and happy, and where he is considered as good as those he is with" (Wilson 137), a home unlike the Belmont's. She does not abandon her son but attempts to situate him in safety. The fictional Frado was in reality, Harriet Wilson. Character and author were one in the same. In writing and

publishing *Our Nig*, Frado Smith/Harriet Wilson makes a secondary attempt to break the cycle of child abandonment through literacy. “I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and my child without extinguishing this feeble life” (Preface). Tragically, George Mason dies shortly after the novel’s publication.

### “This Little Light of Mine”<sup>65</sup>: Childhood

Mrs. Bellmont’s brutality systematically robs Frado of humanity. The child regresses from Mag’s daughter to nigger, to mule. The process mimics slavery’s deliberate dehumanization of African Americans. Author and folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston captures this process in a folk tale that the character Nanny, a former slave, narrates to her granddaughter, Janie.

When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sang and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chipped him into millions of pieces, but he still glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one with mud. And the lonesomeness in the sparks made them hunt for one another ... Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, they had tried to show her shine.  
(Hurston 86)

The tale captures Alfrado Smith’s childhood: she has experienced the death of her biological father, the rejection of a step-father, and abandonment by her biological mother, followed by years of unrelenting cruelty. None of these factors rob Frado of a desire for childhood. Early in the novel, the author suggests that the child’s willfulness

---

<sup>65</sup> The tune “This Little Light of Mine” has been attributed to the composer Harry Dixon Loes, circa 1920; however, the tune is often considered a Negro spiritual.

contributed to her abandonment. The child confirms this allegation by dramatically refusing adoption. Though the event provides sufficient evidence of willfulness to seal the child's fate, it does not provide convincing evidence that she is wicked. Instead, we learn that she is quick witted and mirthful, traits that win over her classmates, her teacher, workmen on the farm, and members of the Bellmont family.

Miss Marsh, a classroom teacher, orchestrates friendship between Frado and the white students, thus fulfilling in microcosm Frank J. Webb's desire for racially mixed schools and "racial equality in the classroom." Frado is the only black child at the school, and the other children assault her with racial epithets. Mrs. Marsh, offers a moment of instruction to the students. "She reminded [the students] of their duties to the poor and friendless; their cowardice in attacking a young innocent child; and referred them to one who looks not on outward appearance but on the heart" (Wilson 32). The teacher's counsel embodies Frank. J. Webb's assertion to "see beneath the coloured skin" (Sollors 444). And Wilson's placement of the female teacher [Miss Marsh] as the spokeswoman for educational and social reform (173) parallels Webb's similar placement of the philanthropist, Mrs. Bird, who advocates the same for her protégé Charlie Ellis.

Threats of Mrs. Bellmont's cruelty contained Frado's desire for childhood play. "In Mrs. Bellmont's presence, [Frado] was under restraint" (38), in that her "spunky, 'mirthful' personality is temperamentally at odds with the servile role she is forced to play" (Singley 132). School was a safe space in which she could be a child. "It is the only location in the novel where 'nig' finds true respite from abuse and where she gains

the respect of her peers and her teacher” (Raimon 172). Frado not only gains the friendship of her classmates, her jollity and flair for pranks earn their loyalty. Away from Mrs. Bellmont’s control, the child amuses herself and others with playful tricks.

Dressed in the cast-off clothing and no shoes, Frado’s attire has a minstrel quality that elicits taunting from her classmates, but her pranks overcome Otherness and promote camaraderie. Frado converts would-be bullies into friends by responding to their “Granny Bellmont” taunts with witty retorts and a jovial demeanor. The children’s affection for Frado and their love of her jollity, “sly pranks,” frequent “outburst of merriment,” and “antics” outweigh bullying desires. In a memorable scene, she dupes another classroom teacher. Having puffed away at a cigar, she fills his desk drawer with smoke. The prank causes him to scream “fire,” drawing laughter from students privy to the joke. School was a refuge from Mrs. Bellmont. It was a place where she could safely be a child and a place where she could enjoy childhood with playmates. “[A]ny of [her classmates] would suffer wrongly to keep open the avenues of mirth” (Wilson 38, 39). As the author observes, “Strange, one spark of playfulness could remain amid constant toil; but [Frado’s] natural temperament was in a high degree mirthful” (Wilson 53). She is the class clown whom fellow students love and protect – her resilience duly noted.

A prank with sheep also symbolizes a moment when the child reorders her temporal world. Instead of replicating Mrs. Bellmont’s physical abuse, Frado punishes a sheep which had previously thrown her through other means. She avenges the sheep by taking advantage of the animal’s greed and willfulness. She prepares a mock meal and

places it at high point near a stream, so that when the animal bounds for it, she stealthily maneuvers him into the water. This brings laughter from the workmen who Frado does not know are witnessing the event. Allegorically, the battle is with Mrs. Bellmont.

Though Frado cannot openly retaliate for Mrs. Bellmont's cruelty, she does so by proxy, much like Frank J. Webb's Charlie Ellis punishes Aunt Rachel by way of her beloved cat. Frado punishes the sheep as she would Mrs. Bellmont or her daughter, Mary. Frado confides to Aunt Abby, "I'd like to try my hand at curing [Mary]" as she did the cross sheep (Wilson 80). Frado's opportunity to openly rebuke Mrs. Bellmont occurs later at a dinner scene.

While uninhibited play empowers childhood, it also partially restores wholeness. Frado does not fully realize the risk involved with her sheep trick. A wrong move and the trick would have turned into a deadly drowning. When Mr. Bellmont "talked seriously to the child for exposing herself to such danger ... she hopped about on her toes, and with laughable grimaces replied, she knew she was quick enough to 'give [the sheep] a slide'" (Wilson 55). Frado's agility, self-assuredness, and naïveté are universal characterizations of childhood, traits that Mrs. Bellmont cannot efface. During the brief span of a trick, the child is in control of her world.

In yet another trick, the child claims self-possession while transferring otherness to her oppressor. Frado renders Mrs. Bellmont as the butt of an unvoiced joke. As the child reaches for a clean dinner plate, Mrs. Bellmont insists that little girl eat from her [Bellmont's] dirty plate and with her [Bellmont's] dirty utensils. Like Frank Webb's

Charlie Ellis, Frado delivers an insulting prank with easily recognizable gestures.<sup>66</sup>

First, the child looks about quickly to insure that James is present before proceeding and signifying – an African American form of circumlocution, makes commentary without articulation. Oftentimes only those within the hermeneutical circle of signification are privy to the implied message. A signifier thus could effectively offend or insult without detection. “As black youngsters began to “‘signify,’ they learned how to say something that on the surface seemed innocent enough, but was in fact highly critical. Such verbal techniques could be used ... to put down whites without physical risk” (Mitchell-Kernan and Dundes qtd. in Clement 177). Frado revises this strategy in that her criticism of Mrs. Bellmont is mute. In the woman’s presence and in a clear act of passive aggression, she gives the plate to her dog to lick clean while she cleans the knife and fork on a cloth (Wilson 71). During the process, neither does she look at Mrs. Bellmont nor does she acknowledge the woman’s presence. The child’s implied shunning of Mrs. Bellmont is equally as powerful as the message behind the dog and plate trick. In one regard, the child’s actions speak to her bond with her pet, a private moment in which they prepare to dine. But those same actions also suggest that the dog is cleaner than Mrs. Bellmont.

Given Mrs. Bellmont’s penchant for wicked cruelty to a child, she is unclean, both morally and spiritually. Her filthy mouth and fiery temper produce “words that burn.” Therefore, as Ophelia recoils at the thought of touching the filthy, heathenish

---

<sup>66</sup> Scholar Mel Watkins explains that “black humor is as much physical as it is verbal. Jokes and gags are usually delivered with recognizable expressions and gestures, which in themselves, are a source of humor among blacks” (41). Frado insults Mrs. Bellmont through a joke with the same efficacy.



Topsy, and as the white maids consider the idea of dining with the black Charlie Ellis sickening, Frado conveys the same loathing for Mrs. Bellmont. The insult undermines Mrs. Bellmont's training and confirms James's observation: Frado is very "bright" (Wilson 25). Frado's joke returns insult taught to her by Mrs. Bellmont. The child rebels against the system, cruel servitude, that "renders her as an object," (Andrews 65) a nigger, a mule, and a dog. She "claims what we might call an existential authenticity and freedom while still in bondage" (Andrews 65). She exercises a freedom to choose the conditions under which she dines; she openly confers insult through innuendo; and in doing so, she effectively rebels against her oppressor. During these moments, Frado claims order and control over her indenture.

Through Frado's antics the author achieves "comic distancing," rising above "racism's cruel, drab realities and inject[ing] a note that lightens the mood of the reader and the tone of the narrative" (Barksdale 23). From schoolhouse pranks, and barnyard antics, to a "dog and plate" trick, Frado rises from muck of indentured servitude, and "Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, ... she had tried to show her shine" (Hurstons 86).

#### The "Closet of the Soul" (Walker 78)

Young Frado's spiritual quest begins with catechism. In writing from a child's perspective in the following exchange, Wilson constructs a scene that mirrors Ophelia's attempts to catechize Topsy, but the roles are reversed. Frado asks James,

Who made me so?

God;” answered James.

Did God make you?

Yes.

Who made your mother?

God.

Did the same God that made her make me?

Yes.

Well, then, I don’t like him. (Wilson 51)

Wilson crystallizes Frado’s humanity through innocent query and a critique of a child.

The child’s concern lies not with the existence of God, but with the possibility of polytheism. The existence of more than one god would explain the co-existence of good and evil: sympathetic Aunt Abby and wicked Mrs. Bellmont, a vulnerable child and a she-devil. Frado’s interrogation is age old. The speaker in Blake’s “The Tyger” asks,

What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?  
...what art  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
...In what furnace was thy brain?  
...Did he who made the Lamb make thee? (lines 3, 4, 9, 10, 14, 20)

Symbolically, the poem follows and questions Mrs. Bellmont’s spiritual contours.

Blake’s speaker suggests that the tiger is Satan’s handiwork, but Mrs. Bellmont is not the

product of evil. She is God's creation, yet she is evil. This assessment would be unspeakable for James or anyone in the Bellmont family. Their silence leaves Frado to despise that which she does not understand.

At one point, Frado attributes her lonely, abject life to racial blackness and contemplates suicide. She sobs,

Oh! oh! ...why was I made? why can't I die? Oh what have I to live for? No one cares for me only to get my work. And I feel sick; who cares for that? Work as long as I can stand, and then fall down and lay there till I get up. No mother, father, brother or sister to care for me, and then it is, You lazy nigger, lazy nigger – all because I am black! Of, if I could die! (Wilson 75)

Her lament extends and elaborates Shelley's apostrophe "Misery!" which opens Chapter II of the novel (Wilson 14). The lament also gives substance to Topsy's perception of racial blackness. Topsy explains to Eva, "There can't nobody love niggers, and niggers can't do nothin'!" (*UTC* 245). Both children establish a causal relationship between blackness and evil. Topsy views her racial blackness as the source of her wickedness, but through the voice of Frado, the author voices a contrasting perspective. Frado surmises that she suffers abuse because her racial blackness engenders wickedness in others.

With both views resulting in self-hatred, Topsy resigns herself to emotional detachment, "I don't care," and begins to whistle. Frado questions the purpose of her own existence. The parallel is striking in that both children are consoled by sympathizers – Eva's loving words and touch for Topsy and James Bellmont's comforting words to Frado. But hypocrisy sabotages James's intent. He reassures the child that "thousands

upon thousands of [people] who favored the elevation of [Frado's] race, disapprov[e] of oppression in all its forms" (Wilson 76). James, however, does not model that which he asserts. He does not attempt to intervene in his mother's cruelty, and his efforts to comfort the child appear clandestine. Thus his reassurances are little more than lip service. James Bellmont represents thousands of nineteenth-century Americans apologists, who advocate racial uplift but fail to act.

Frado's singing then, becomes an act of agency that situates her on a spiritual plane which exists only within her temporal sphere. Singing the sacred songs from religious meetings "enliven[s] her toil (Wilson 69). In this manner, she mimics the singing of slave spirituals. First, she transforms the music heard from the whites into her own use (qtd. in Levine 60). Secondly, singing allowed her "to transcend, at least symbolically," restrictions imposed by Mrs. Bellmont "by permitting [her] to express deeply held feelings which [she] ordinarily was not allowed to verbalize" (Levine 67). Moreover, through singing, Frado creates a spiritual world that extends spatially towards the heavens in order to allow communion with the other world (73). That same world extends backwards and transforms into soothing temporal balm for her oppressed spirit.

In addition to singing, Frado finds spiritual comfort in the practice of Bible reading and the quest for spirituality, but Mrs. Bellmont complains that schooling has empowered Frado with access to religion. The good woman condemns Frado's Bible reading as false piety, and she sarcastically expresses concerns that the child will begin proselytizing white folks or worse – experience a Christian conversion. Mrs. Bellmont's

remarks may have been influenced by nineteenth-century African American exhorters such as Mrs. Jarena Lee who, after a spiritual conversion, traveled throughout New England with her preachings.

Mrs. Lee, free-born in New Jersey in 1783, went to live as a “servant maid” at the age of six with a Mr. Sharp. His residence was sixty miles from her home. Her spirituality grew from a meeting in which a Presbyterian minister read the following words Psalms:

Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin,  
Born unholy and unclean.  
Sprung from man, whose guilty fall  
Corrupts the race, and taints us all. (Lee 3)

Lee writes that “This description of my condition struck me to the heart ... and made me to feel the weight of my sins, and sinful nature” (4). Through verse, Mrs. Lee aligns her personal sinful nature with Adam’s fall, but as a child servant vulnerable to exploitation, her sinful nature could have been influenced by factors “unholy and unclean.” Although she contemplates suicide to cleanse her sinful nature, Mrs. Lee strives for Christian salvation. She chronicles an experience similar to that of Frado. “During this state of mind ... a view of my distressed condition so affected my heart, that I could not refrain from weeping and crying aloud; which caused the lady with whom I then lived, to inquire, with surprise what ailed me. She replied that I ought to pray (Lee 7).”

As the prayers are interrupted, Lee attributes the event to the work of Satan. Nonetheless, her companion interprets the former slave’s aspirations for salvation as

genuine and offers spiritual support. Mrs. Lee documents that she was called to preach about four or five years after her conversion. Post conversion, she traveled throughout New England preaching conversion to others.

Frado undergoes a similar emotional conversion experience. She is “thoughtful and tearful at meetings ... Here she was, reading and shedding tears over the Bible” (Wilson 86, 87). But Mrs. Bellmont intervenes by ordering Frado to put the Bible away. The she-devil’s unspoken concern is that a converted Frado could expose the brutality of her treatment and expose her [Mrs. Bellmont] as a religious fraud. In reality, Rebecca Hutchinson’s exposure as a fraudulent abolitionist would have undermined abolitionist efforts of the Hutchinson Family Singers as well as “provoked shame” across the abolitionist circuit. On this possibility alone, Wilson’s reticence in divulging every “transaction” (Preface) in her life is well-founded.

Frado’s spiritual conversion continues in the privacy of her garret. It was “a little spot seldom penetrated by her mistress’ watchful eye.”

The space was “uninviting and comfortless; but to [Frado] a retreat. Here she would listen to the pleadings of a Savior, and try to penetrate the veil of doubt and sin which clouded her soul, and long to cast off the fetters of sin, and rise to the communion of the saints. (Wilson 87)

The child’s attic room evolves similarly into a sacred space, a spiritual closet where, in isolation and privacy, she can order her universe through literary and prayer. Under the tutelage of Aunt Abby and the minister, Frado becomes “a believer in a future existence – one of happiness or misery. Her doubt was, *is there a heaven for the black?*” Is there a

heaven for her? She struggles with repentance, “what was that?” (Wilson 84). Attempts to sort out the confusion resulted in tearful readings of the Bible. Aunt Abby interprets the child’s behavior as evidence that “a heavenly messenger [is] striving with [Frado]” (86), but the emotional readings annoy Mrs. Bellmont. To evade Mrs. Bellmont and continue her spiritual quest, Frado resorts to her attic chamber

The chamber is not only a refuge from the she-devil, the attic location places the child on a physical plane closer to the heavens and the God she seeks. “From here, she could gaze out upon the stars, which she felt, studded the entrance of heaven.” From here, she “wished she could see God ... ask for eternal life ... or hear him speak words of forgiveness” (Wilson 99)..In these private moments in her apartment, away from her oppressor, Frado, with her Bible, is in her “prayer closet” where she seeks divine communion and where she attempts to order her spiritual universe. It is a practice that she shares with Stowe’s Uncle Tom.

After a day of hard field labor on Legree plantation, “Tom sat down by the light of the fire, and drew out his Bible, -- for he had need of comfort” (Stowe, *UTC* 302). In the private company of fellow slaves, Tom reads as the narrator attempts to create temporal and spiritual order in the slave’s universe. After reading, he quietly sits by the fire with his arms folded and Bible on his knee. The narrator asks,

‘Is God here?’ Ah, how is it possible for the untaught heart to keep its faith, unswerving, in the face of dire misrule, and palpable, unrebuked injustice? In that simple heart waged a fierce conflict: the crushing sense of wrong, the foreshadowing of a whole life of future misery, the wreck of all past hopes, mournfully tossing in the soul’s sight .... (Stowe, *UTC* 303)

Although Tom is clearly the narrator's referent, the lyrical exhortation could have just as easily addressed Frado. But as with Jarena Lee, Tom hears a guiding voice from the spirit world. He hears Eva St. Clare reading a passage from the Bible to him which foretells his future earthly days and reassures him of God's presence (Stowe, *UTC* 303). Convinced that Eva has spoken to him and that she awaits him in heaven, Tom accepts death as divinely ordained. Although Wilson does not experience any spiritual intervention, her garret space remains holy through her readings of the Bible and continued supplications for salvation. Though Alfrado considers herself unfit for heaven, her private attic space positions her on a physical plane above the Bellmonts and closer to the cosmos. As such, the garret creates an earthly "heaven" for the child and as it places her spiritually above the she-devil.

*Our Nig* implies that Frado's cannot enter Heaven because she is wicked, fettered by sin. One possible explanation lies in Frado's initial rejection of God, but her persistent search for salvation compensates for this attitude. Beyond that rejection, she does not indicate the nature of her sin. Mag's reference to her six-year-old daughter as a black devil is insufficient. While Mag's defines "black devil" as wild, willful, and frolicky, the novel counters such depictions with terms as jollity, merriment, mirthful, high glee, and playfulness (Wilson 38, 53). If Mag had a penchant for alcoholic beverages, it is entirely possible that the "disease" clouded the mother's view of her child. While in servitude with the Bellmonts, Frado never exhibited anger or aggression



to anyone in the household although she was routinely battered. Perhaps the sin may be unspeakable, thus justifying the censorship of every transaction in her life.

### Conversion

Frado's quest for spirituality evokes Topsy's conversion from wickedness to Christianity during Eva's deathbed scene. Topsy laments to Eva, "There can't nobody love niggers, and niggers can't do nothin', I don't care," and begins to whistle. The saintly Eva responds.

O Topsy, poor child, I love you!' said Eva, with a sudden burst of feeling, and laying her thin little white hand on Topsy's shoulder; 'I love you, because you haven't had any father, or mother, or friends; -- because you've been a poor abused child! I love you and I want you to be good.' ... The round keen eyes of the black child were overcast with tears; -- large, bright drops rolled heavily down, one by one, and fell on the little white hand. Yes, in that moment, a ray of heavenly love had penetrated the darkness of her heathen soul! She laid her head down between her knees, and wept and sobbed, -- while the beautiful child, bending over her, looked like the picture of some bright angel ... stooping to reclaim a sinner. (Stowe, *UTC* 245)

Eva professes her love and the love of God to Topsy: the slave child is loved both temporally and spiritually. Eva, as Stowe's living angel, performs a "laying on of hands" a miraculous touch which coupled with professions of love instantly converts the slave child from wickedness to Christian goodness.

In *Our Nig*, Frado and James Bellmont enact a similar deathbed scene, but James's deathbed request runs counter to the child's sensibilities. The dying James takes the hand of Frado who is seated near his bed and offers the following:

My Heavenly Father is calling me home. ... I shall go and leave you. Frado, if you will be a good girl, and love and serve God, it will be but a short time before we are in *heavenly* home together. There will never be any sickness or sorrow there.' Frado overcome with grief, sobbed, and buried her face in his pillow. She expected he would die; but to hear him speak of his departure himself was unexpected. 'Bid me good bye, Frado.' She kissed him and sank on her knees by his bedside; his hand rested on her head; his eyes were closed; his lips moved in prayer for this disconsolate child. (Wilson 95, 96)

The conversion fails as James's persuasive thrust lies in the claim that he and Frado will *soon* (my emphasis) reunite in Heaven, an assertion predicated on three conditions: Frado must be good, and she must love and serve God. In other words, she must continue to endure Mrs. Bellmont's abuse and exploitation without redress. Furthermore, she must love and serve a God that made the likes of Mrs. Bellmont and for that reason, a God whom Frado dislikes. Although she prays in earnest after James's death, her efforts are misguided. Her motivation is the hope that her rituals will facilitate a reunion with James in heaven.

Neither James's counsel, "laying on of hands", or prayer effect a change in Frado. When James orders Frado, "Bid me good bye," she kisses him. Her kiss is unexpected, in that the narrative establishes no precedence for intimacy between the two. So when the dying man places his hand on Frado's head and utters a prayer, the good-bye kiss further undercuts the spiritual import of his ritual. His death becomes a pivotal moment in Frado's spirituality. She wants to go to heaven only because James is there. But she could not join him in death because "She did not love God; she did not serve him or know how to" (Wilson 99). James's efforts fail before they begin because he is complicit

in his mother's sin. He does nothing to stop his mother's cruelty. Yet when he dies, Frado's behavior mimics that of Topsy at Eva's death. "Sinking on her knees at the foot of his bed, she buried her face in the clothes, and wept like one inconsolable" (Wilson 97). The combined efforts of Frado, Abby, and James could not effect a spiritual conversion for Frado. The Bellmonts' spirituality is at best shallow, diluted by racism and hypocrisy. In full knowledge of Mrs. Bellmont's sadistic treatment of Frado, the remainder of the family is truly trafficking with the *sh*edevil. The family's religious example leaves the child, like so many slaves, conflicted but determined to find her own God.

#### Seduction?

Was there more than platonic affection between the two? James saw in Frado "a kind, affectionate heart, native wit, and common sense" (Wilson 69). Frado, on the other hand, "felt so happy in his presence, so safe from maltreatment" (67). The text offers clues which lead in that direction. Scholar Ronna C. Johnson argues that through coded narrative irregularities, Harriet Wilson elides sexual abuse in her tale. The preface, for example, warns that Wilson will not "divulge" every transaction of Frado's autobiography. And *Our Nig* closes with the note that some part of Frado's history is "unknown save by the Omniscient God" (96, 97). My analysis of the text suggests that in addition to clues by elision, Wilson offers more concrete hints of a sexual history at the Bellmont home.

In a home full of men, the beautiful maturing mulatta becomes both male attraction and temptation. James is the first to recognize six-year-old Frado as “handsome.” As a testament to either her jealousy of Frado’s beauty and/or concerns about her sexual attractiveness, Mrs. Bellmont shears Frado’s “glossy ringlets for fear that “Frado was getting too handsome” (Wilson 70).

Mrs. Bellmont’s fears of Frado in a relationship with one of the family men or one of the workmen may have partially facilitated her rage, and that rage may have been fueled by circumstances. Female indentured servants who lived in homes were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Wilson writes that her garret was one location that escaped Mrs. Bellmont’s watchful eyes. And Wilson illustrates the she-devil’s nosiness and potential for dissembling in her treatment of James’s wife, Jenny. To break up the marriage, Mrs. Bellmont watched Jenny “incessantly, to catch at some act of Jenny’s which might be construed into conjugal unfaithfulness” (Wilson 113). With the same diligence and motives, Mrs. Bellmont more than likely “watched” Frado. It is possible that Mrs. Bellmont perceived Frado’s relationship with one of the Bellmont men as too cordial. James seems the most likely candidate because his relationship with Frado. After she has been badly beaten by Mrs. Bellmont, James keeps Frado with him for the rest of the day. He orders his wife to take Charlie for a walk, and in the meantime, he comforts Frado unsupervised. As Johnson argues, Wilson does not totally account for these instances in which Frado and James are alone, especially given that he boasts to Abby “She has such confidence in me that she will do just as I tell her” (Wilson 75).

James's death scene requires deeper inquiry. A telling moment is when the distraught Frado buries her head into James's deathbed pillow. When the dying James asks Frado to bid him good-bye, she kisses him, but on what authority? What motivates her to do so? These transactions take place while they are alone, but intimacy stops just before Susan, James's wife enters the room. The question lingers, were they more intimate at other times? *Our Nig* concludes with Frado's analogy to the Biblical Joseph: "The analogy ... locates her as an object of sexual interest to her mistress's opposites, the Bellmont men, and indeed the story of their activities behind Mrs. Bellmont's back forms the subject of the tale's subtext" (Johnson 100). At his funeral, Frado desires to share James's grave, and her yearning for Heaven is for the sole purpose of joining him. Finally, Mag's sultry seduction, in the novel's opening paragraph easily doubles as Wilson's tale of seduction. As the introductory paragraph foregrounds Frado's eventual courtship and marriage to Samuel, it subversively swathes over the hint of another more clandestine experience. Perhaps the sin for which Frado's seek redemption lay in desire: her desire for James, his desire for her, or their mutual desire for each other. By omitting portions of the narrative that might appear salacious, but leaving textual clues pointing in that direction, Wilson invites attention to her unspeakable past. Perhaps this invitation is deliberate. In Frado's relationship with James, *Our Nig* leaves room for readers to contemplate the "what."

### Conclusion: Liberation and Redemption

The mythos upon which Mrs. Bellmont perceives, receives, and (mis)treats Frado is a direct trajectory of the fictional Topsy and the archetypal enslaved black child. Mrs. Bellmont imagines Frado as an indestructible Other who can withstand cruelty and brutality with relative ease. Her treatment of the child draws readers directly into slavery's "appurtenances" in the North and through indentured service. *Our Nig* deconstructs and debunks the Topsian archetype and places the true "evil" of slavery where it aptly belongs, with the novel's antagonist, a racist Northern abolitionist.

In order to present hardships and brutality that she suffered from ages six through eighteen as an indentured servant, Wilson couches autobiography in fiction. She exposes the duality of racism and Northern abolitionism in the character of Mrs. Bellmont. The she-devil was in reality Rebecca Hutchinson, a member of the abolitionist Hutchinson family. Members of the Hutchinson family formed a singing group and gained notoriety for their songs addressing slavery and gaining the support of notables such as Frederick Douglass. Mrs. Bellmont/Rebecca Hutchinson alleged abolitionism was a matter of social necessity. Public disclosure of her cruelty would have not only endowed her with historical infamy, it would have also disgraced the family nationally.

Wilson's text, structured much like the slave narrative, employs elements of the sentimental formula, the seduction narrative, the adoption narrative, the conversion narrative, and the fairy tale to depict the protagonist's suffering and her oppressor's cruelty. *Our Nig* also rewrites the adoption and conversion narratives, centerpieces of

*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to challenge Stowe's structure and content. Whereas Stowe presents Ophelia as the Northern abolitionist who teaches and adopts Topsy, Wilson illustrates that the adoption of a black child by a white family is not as simple and straightforward. Ophelia is the exception, especially in comparison to the Bellmont family. Her adoption of Topsy appears more as an act of redemption, one that assuages guilt and hypocrisy. According to Stowe's "right feeling" model, Ophelia's salvation is yoked to contrition and change.

Mrs. Bellmont has no such designs. Wilson exposes her as a fraudulent Christian as well as a fraudulent abolitionist. The she-devil represents many Ophelias, Northerners who profess Christianity and abolitionism, but delight in the practice of racism. Through Mrs. Bellmont, Wilson exposes the depth of racism in the North, and Wilson cautions that the abolitionist branding may not only be superficial but may also conceal racial hatred more venomous than in the slave-holding South.

Wilson's narrative elaborates Frank J. Webb's hints of abuses experienced by hired servants in *The Garies and Their Friends*. While Charlie, Webb's child protagonist, receives beatings as punishment for pranks, Frado receives beatings as the result of a sadistic mistress. Charlie's mother rescues him from service, but Frado's mother abandons her to the devices of a known cruel woman. There is no happy ending for her twelve years of abuse. Frado's tale, the dark underside of service in the North, resumes Webb's argument that the nineteenth-century black child in service, hired or indentured, is enslaved. *Our Nig* effectively "clears a space" in the novel "in which 'our

nig': can assert her essential humanity [and the humanity of all nineteenth-century black children]" (Davis 400). As such the novel functions as a redress for those Northern abolitionists and Southern apologists who offer either indentured service or slavery as benevolent structures designed to protect black children.



## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

President Lincoln allegedly credited *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with starting the Civil War. To a reader unfamiliar with slavery, the novel gives the impression that the antebellum plantation is a mythical world where enslaved children thrive and play. It novel presents the enslaved black children as wild, willful, and wicked minstrel-inspired creatures who thrive under the guise of benevolent paternalism. These children also provide comic relief to the melodramatic scenes of slavery through performance and antics. In doing so, they appear as bestial creatures who have also been trained, who are insensible to pain. And who are virtually indestructible.

Prior to the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, black children received very little attention. Writers such as John Pendleton Kennedy depicted enslaved black children in pastoral scenes on the plantation, but he simultaneously tags them with metaphors such as “imps,” and “goblins.” Although Stowe continued and expanded this narrative tagging in her depictions, she also placed the children front and center on her narrative version of the minstrel stage.

Although Stowe's depictions were frauds based on stereotype, they presented black children as she imagined them. They fulfilled her greater narrative objective – to

infuse refreshing humor in an otherwise grim tale. So for Stowe, these children played an important role in maintaining the reader interest. They uniquely served as agents of her abolitionist message and religious exhortations. The runaway sales of her novel mark the success of her strategy. Riding on the coattails of the novel's success were ongoing national and international discussions of the American black child. Perhaps her selection of black children for this task reflects a certain genuine interest that she had in the African American child in spite of her adherence to racial hierarchies. Yet her depictions as caricatures are problematic.

Nineteenth-century African American writers were justifiably concerned with presenting the horrors of slavery. Former slaves related their autobiographies as evidence of cruelties, to re-establish a selfhood that slavery of robbed from them, and to propel the abolitionist movement. Their narratives reference childhood but do not maintain a sustained discussion. For these writers, the greater impetus was exposure of the total experience. The representations of enslaved black children and childhood in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, moved writers to respond with realistic depictions.

Frank J. Webb and Harriet E. Wilson were among the literary respondents. Webb's, *The Garies*, moves Stowe's stock, static caricature to dynamic characters. His novel parallels Stowe in that it employs the black child to advocate abolitionism, but it doubles to identify problems associated with black childhood in the North, racism, education, and employment. These characters present simple yet ingenious solutions to these while forcing white characters to "re-evaluate prejudice" (Gardner 16). Like

Stowe's exhortations, his narrative directs the reader towards "right feelings" and proper actions.

*Our Nig* presents the black child in all of her human complexities. The novel debunks Stowe's Topsyian mythology and challenges readers to consider the presence and plight of nineteenth-century African American orphans in the North. The text also challenge readers to consider Northern indentured service as expanded dialectics on Southern slavery. The novel asserts an empirical voice for children, whose vulnerable and arbitrary brutality was invisible to the nation and the world.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ammons, Elizabeth. Ed. *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Casebook*.

Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. Malcolm Heath. London: Penguin, 1996. Print.

Bailey, Thomas Pierce. *Race Orthodoxy in the South: and Other Aspects of the*

*Negro Question*. New York: Neale P., 1914. Print.

Baldwin, James. "Everybody's Protest Novel." *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Elizabeth

Ammons. Norton Critical ed. New York; London: W. W. Norton &

Company, 1994. Print.

Bassard, Katherine Clay. *Transforming Scriptures: African American Women*

*Writers and the Bible*. Athens, GA: The U of Georgia P, 2010. Print.

Bean, Annmarie, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara. eds. *Inside the Minstrel*

*Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Hanover: UP of

New England, 1996. Print.

Beard, Matthew "Stymie", perf. *Jezebel*. Dir. William Wyler. Warner Bros.

Pictures, 1923-1967.

Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave. A True History*. 1688. New York: W.

W. Norton, 1997. Print.

Bellin, Joshua D. "Up to Heaven's Gate, Down to Earth's Dust: The Politics of

- Judgment in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.” *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Casebook*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.
- Betz, Paul R. and Mark C. Carnes. eds. *American National Biography. Supplement 2*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- Bible: New International Version*. BibleGateway.com. 09 Sep. 2012.  
<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+5&version=NIV>.
- Birdoff, Harry. *The World's Greatest Hit: Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: S. F. Vanni Publishers, 1947. Print.
- Boime, Albert. *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution P, 1990. Print.
- Braxton, Joanne M. and Andree Nicola McLaughlin. eds. *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1990. Print.
- Brooks, Daphne A. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. Print.
- Brown, Gillian. “Getting in the Kitchen with Dinah.” *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Casebook*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.
- Brown, Jayna. *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. Print.

- Brown, Sterling. *The Negro in American Fiction*. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat P, 1937. Print.
- Brown, William Wells. *Clotel: or the President's Daughter*. 1863. *Three Classic American Novels*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print
- Burns, Sarah. *Painting the Dark Side*. Berkley: U of California P, 2004. Print.
- Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Beacon P: Boston, 1979. Print.
- Carroll, Willard and Thomas A. Wilhite. *Robin Harris's Bébé's Kids..* Dir. Bruce Smith. DVD. Paramount, 1993.
- Cartwright. "Dr. Cartwright on the Caucasians and the Africans." *De Bow's Review: Industrial Resources, Statistics, etc.: Commerce, Agriculture, Manufacture, Internal Improvements, Political Economy, Education, General Literature, etc.* XXV. (1858) Proquest. Web. 10 Jul 2012.
- Cassuto, Leonard. *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature and Culture*. Columbia UP: New York, 1997. Print.
- Chakkalakal, Tess. *Novel Bondage: Slavery, Marriage, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century America*. Urbana: U of Chicago P, 2011. Print.
- Clark, Susan F. "Solo Performance before the Civil War: Mrs. Stowe, Mrs. Webb, and "The Christian Slave." *New Theater Quarterly*. 13.52 (1997): 339-48. Print.
- Clarke, Lewis. *Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clarke, During a Captivity of*

- More than Twenty-Five Years, among the Algerines of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of North America.* Web. 12 Mar. 2013.
- Documenting the American South Project. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2011. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/clarke/menu.html>
- Clement, Priscilla Ferguson. *Growing Pains: Children in the Industrial Age, 1850-1890*. New York: Twayne P, 1997. Print.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome and Gail Weiss. *Thinking the Limits of the Body*. Albany, NY: State of New York P, 2003. Print.
- “Coon Dat Carried De Razor.” Philadelphia: A. W. Auner Song Publisher and Printer. Inventory of the American Song Sheets Collection, circa 1850s – 1880s. Box 1. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Duke University. Digital Image.
- <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/songsheets>
- Crockett, Rosemary F. “Frank J. Webb: The Shift to Color Discrimination.” *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in American Literature and Culture*. Ed. Werner Sollors and Maria Diedrich. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994. Print.
- Cruikshank, Esq., George. Illus. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. London: John Casseli, Ludgate Hill, 1852. Print.
- Davis, Arthur P. Introduction. *The Garies and Their Friends*. New York: Arno Press, 1969. Print.
- Dean, Carolyn. “Boys and Girls and ‘boys’: Popular Depictions of African-American

- Children and Childlike Adults in the United States, 1850-1930. *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*. 23 (3). (2002): Proquest. Web. 09 Jul 2012.
- Donnell, Alison and Pauline Polkey. eds. *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/biography*. St. Martin's P: New York, 2000. Print.
- Donovan, Josephine. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Evil, Affliction, and Redemptive Love*. Boston: Twayne P, 1991. Print.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. Print.
- Douglass, Frederick. "A Year's Work." *Frederick Douglass Papers*. *North Star*. 22 Apr. 1853: 2. *Slavery & Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive*. Gale. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.
- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York: Miller, Ortman, and Mulligan, 1855. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/202/202-h/202-h.htm> Web. 08 Dec 2012.
- Douglass, Frederick and Harriet Jacobs. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. Print.
- DuBois, W. E. B. "The Talented Tenth." *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of To-day*. 1903. Miami Fla.: Mnemosyne Pub., 1969. Print.



- Edwards, Jonathan. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." 1741. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Lauter. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Vol. One. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 592. Print.
- Elkins, Stanley. *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago P, 1959. Print.
- Ellison, Ralph. "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke." *Shadow and Act*. New York: Random, 1953. Print.
- Encyclo Online Encyclopedia. Encyclo MMXII. Web. 04Jan. 2012.  
[www.encyclo.co.uk](http://www.encyclo.co.uk).
- Ervin, Hazel Arnett. *The Handbook of African American Literature*. Gainesville, FL: U of Florida P, 2004. Print.
- Foster, Francis Smith. ed. and Introduction. *Minnie's Sacrifice, Sowing and Reaping, and Trial and Triumph*. Boston: Beacon, 1994. Print.
- . *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993. Print.
- Franchot, Jenny. "The Punishment of Esther: Douglass and the Construction of the Feminine." *Frederick Douglass; New Literary and Historical Essays*. Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Print.
- Gaines, Francis Pendleton. *The Southern Plantation: a Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition*. Gloucester, Mass.: Columbia UP, 1924. Print.

- Gardner, Eric. "'A Gentleman of Superior Cultivation and Refinement': Recovering the Biography of Frank J. Webb." *African American Review*. 35.2 (2001): 297-308. *Gale*. Web. 14 Dec. 2012.
- Garnett, Henry Highland. "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America." 1843. PBS. *Africans in America*.  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2937t.html>. 10 Sep. 2012.
- Genovese, Eugene. *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage, 1976. Print.
- Gossett, Thomas F. *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. Dallas: Southern Methodist UP: 1985. Print.
- Gross, Seymour L. and John Edward Hardy. eds. *Images of the Negro in American Literature*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966. Print.
- Halttunen, Karen. "Gothic Imagination and Social reform: The Haunted Houses of Lyman Beecher, Henry Ward Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe." *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. Norton Critical ed. New York; London: W. W. Norton, 1994. Print.
- Haywood, Chanta. M. "Constructing Childhood: 'The Christian Recorder' and Literature for Black Children, 1854-1865." *African-American Review*. 3 (2002): 417-428. Print.
- Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Harper & Brothers Publishers: New York, London: 1941. Print.

- Heywood, John. *The Phrase Finder*. Web. 21 Jul 2012.
- Hochman, Barbara. *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution: Race, Literacy, Childhood, and Fiction 1851-1911*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2011. Print.
- Hudson, Jr., Larry E. Ed. *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester P, 1994. Print.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. 1965. Print.
- Husch, Gail E. *Something Coming: Apocalyptic Expectation and Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Painting*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000. Print.
- Ingersoll, Ernest. *Birds in Legend, Fable, and Folklore*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923. 166-167. Web. Wikipedia. 24 Nov. 2012.
- Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*. 1861. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. Print.
- Jea, John. *The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher. Compiled and Written by Himself*. 1800. Web. 05 Mar. 2013 Documenting the American South Project. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2011. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jeajohn/jeajohn.html>
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro*,

- 1550-1812. The University of North Carolina P: Chapel Hill, 1968. Print.
- Kennedy, John Pendleton. *Swallow Barn or a Sojourn in the Old Dominion*. 1825.  
New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1962. Print.
- Kimball, Gayle. *The Religious Ideas of Harriet Beecher Stowe: Her Gospel of Womanhood*. New York: The Edwin Mellen P, 1982. Print.
- King, Wilma. *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*.  
Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. Print.
- Lambert, Daniel. Web. 11 Jan 2013.  
[http://www.vintageviews.org/vv3/cemeteries/pages/cem04\\_005.html](http://www.vintageviews.org/vv3/cemeteries/pages/cem04_005.html)
- Lee, Jarena. *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel*. 1849. *Spiritual Narratives*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.
- Lee, Maurice S. *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830-1860*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.
- Levander, Caroline F. *Cradle of Liberty, Race the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. DuBois*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. Print.
- Lhamon Jr. Jr., W. T. *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998. Print.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.

- New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.
- Low, Mary. *A Peep into Uncle Tom's Cabin by 'Aunt Mary': with an Address from Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe to the Children of England and America.* Boston: Jewett, 1853. Print. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
- Lowrance, Jr., Mason I., Ellen E. Westbrook, and R. C. de Prospe. eds. *The Stowe Debate: Rhetorical Strategies in Uncle Tom's Cabin.* University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1994. UNG NetLibrary. Web. 27Mar 2011.
- Magill, Frank N. *Masterpieces of African-American Literature.* New York: HarperCollins, 1992. Print.
- Mahar, William J. *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum Popular Culture.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1999. Print.
- McDowell, Deborah E. and Arnold Rampersad. eds. *Slavery and the Literary Imagination: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1987.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University P, 1989. Print.
- Meer, Sarah. "Topsy and the End Man." *Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Casebook.* Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.
- Mintz, Steven. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood.* Cambridge: Belknap P, 2004. Print.
- Mintz, Steven and John Stauffer eds. *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the*

- Ambiguities of American Reform*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts P, 2007. Print.
- “Miss Dinah Crow.” “Illustrations of Ornithology.” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. 12.68 (1856): 286-287. Web. 12 Feb. 2013.  
<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=harp;cc=harp;rgn>
- Morgan, Jo-Ann. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin as Visual Culture*. Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 2007. Print.
- Nathan, Hans. *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962. Print.
- Nelson, John Herbert. *The Negro Character in American Literature*. College Park, MD: McGrath Publishing Co.: 1926. Print.
- Nowatzki, Robert. “Blurring the Color Line: Black Freedom, Passing, Abolitionism, and Irish Ethnicity in Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends*.” *Studies in American Fiction*. 33.1 (2005): 29-59. *Proquest*. Web. 14 Dec. 2012.
- Nystrom-Stoopendaal, Jenny. Illus. “Sam and Andy Laughed to Their Heart’s Content.” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. 1897. Print. University of Wisconsin Library, Rock County Campus. Digital Image. Web. 10 May 2012.

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/saxon/servlet/SaxonServlet?source=utc/xml/stowe/gallery>

O'Leary, Elizabeth L. *At Beck and Call: The Representation of Domestic Servants in Nineteenth-Century American Painting*. Smithsonian Institution P, 1996. Print.

Olney, James. "‘I Was Born’: Slaves Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *Callaloo*. 20 (1984): 46-73. JSTOR. 04 Oct. 2012.  
<http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.uncg.edu/action/doBasicSearch?Query=Olney%2C+James+%2B+%22I+was+born%22&acc=on&wc=on>

*Online Dictionary*. Web. 07 Dec. 2012

<http://onlinedictionary.datasegment.com/word/to+cut+up+shines>

Otter, Samuel. *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

*Oxford English Dictionary*. UNCG Net Library. Web. 23 Apr. 2012

<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/view/Entry/87339?rskey=CsNBLF&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid1672874>

*Our Gang. The Little Rascals*. Prod. Hal Roach. Genius Entertainment, 1929-1938.

Parsons, C. G. *An Inside View of Slavery: A Tour among the Planters*. Savannah, GA: The Beehive P, 1974. Print.

Pattee, Fred Lewis. *A History of American Literature Since 1870*. New York: The Century Co., 1915. Print.

- “Physical Character of the Negro.” *De Bow’s Review: Industrial Resources, Statistics, etc.: Commerce, Agriculture, Manufacture, Internal Improvements, Political Economy, Education, General Literature, etc. (1850-1852)*. 2. 1858. Proquest. Web. 10 Jul 2012.
- Peterson, Carla. “Capitalism, Black (Under)Development, and the Production of the African-American Novel in the 1850s.” *Oxford Journals*. 4.4 (1992): 559-583. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Dec. 2012.
- Peterson, Carla. “*Doers of the Word*”: *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. New York Oxford UP, 1995. Print.
- Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992. Print.
- Pollard, Edward A. *Black Diamonds: Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South*. 1859. New York: Negro Universities P, 1968. Print.
- Pullman, Phillip. ed. *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm: A New English Version*. New York: Viking, 2012. Print.
- Price, Kenneth M. and Susan Belasco Smith, eds. *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995. Print.
- Rawley, James A. *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History*. Norton: New York, 1981. Print.
- Reynolds, David. S. *Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Battle for America*. New York: Norton, 2011. Print.



- Robberts, John W. *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and in Freedom*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989. Print.
- Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Rostand, Edmond. *Cyrano de Bergerac*. New York: Signet, 1972. Print.
- Rourke, Constance. *American Humor: A Study of the National Character*. New York: Harcourt, 1931. Print.
- Runcie, John. "'Hunting the Nigs' in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834." *Pennsylvania History*. 39.2 Apr. (1972): 187-218. JSTOR. Web. 15 Dec. 2012.
- Schwartz, Marie Jenkins. *Born in Bondage: Growing UP Enslaved in the Antebellum South*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England, 2000. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Ed. David Bevington. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman and Co, 1980. Print.
- Singley, Carol. *Adopting America: Childhood, Kinship, and National Identity in Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.
- Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1977. Print.
- Sollors, Werner. ed. *Frank J. Webb: Fiction, Essays, Poetry*. New Milford, CT: The Toby P, 2004. Print.
- Spillers, Hortense. "Changing the Letter: The Yokes, the Jokes of Discourse, or, Mrs.

- Stowe, Mr. Reed. "Uncle Tom's Cabin and Literary History." *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 1994. Print.
- Stamp, Kenneth M. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. New York: Vintage, 1956. Print.
- Sterling, Dorothy. ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1984. Print.
- Stockton, Elizabeth. "The Property of Blackness: The Legal Fiction of Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*." *African American Review*. 43.2-3. Summer/Fall (2009): 473-486. *Project Muse*. Web. 14 Dec. 2012.
- Stover, Johnnie M. "Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Women's Autobiography." Web. 21 Feb. 2013. <http://www.florida.theorangegrove.org/og/file/.../RhetoricandResistance.pdf>
- Stowe, Charles Edward. *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe: Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*. Houghton: Boston, 1889. Print
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *A Peep into Uncle Tom's Cabin, by "Aunt Mary," for Her Nephews and Nieces*. Boston: Jewett and Company, 1853. Print.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly*. 1852. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 1994. Print.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. "What Is to Be Done?" *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 1994. Print.
- Strausbaugh, John. *Black Like You: Blackness, Whiteface, Insult and Imitation in*

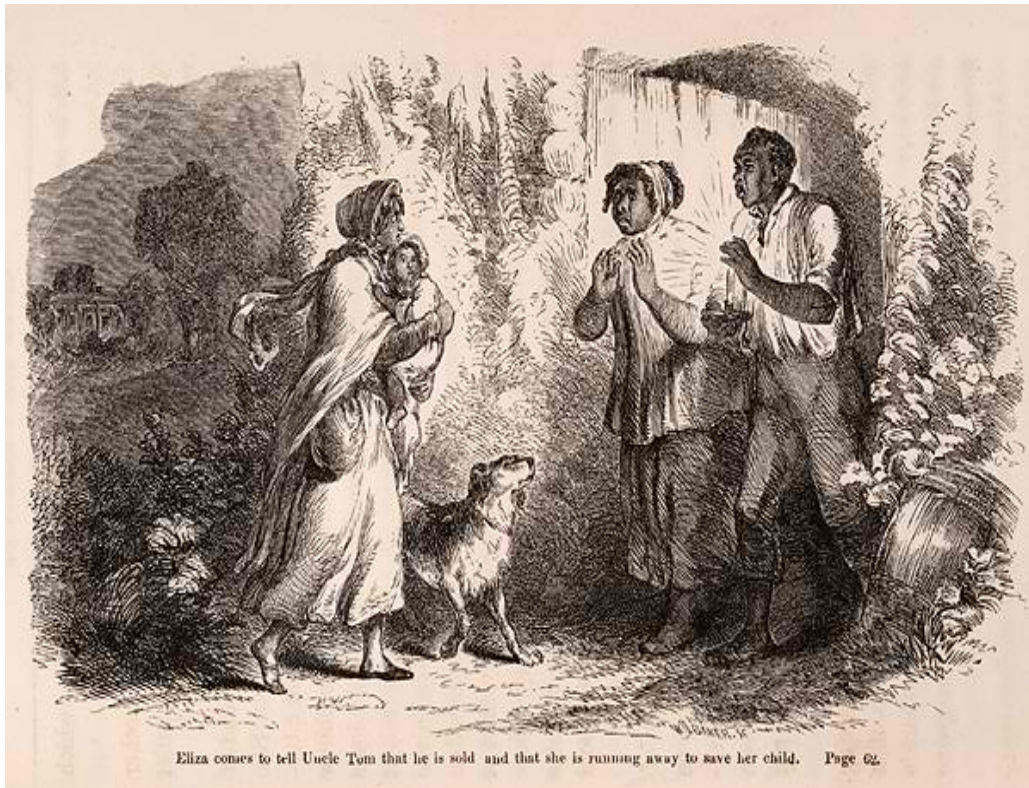
- American Popular Culture*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Strout, Cushing. "Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Portent of Millennium." *The Yale Review*. LVII:1 (1967): 374-385. Print.
- Strausbaugh, John. *Black Like You*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Sundquist, Eric J. ed. *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. Print.
- Takaki, Ronald. "The Black Child-Savage in Ante-Bellum America." *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America*. Ed. Gary B. Nash and Richard Weiss. New York: Holt, 1974. Print.
- Thurman, Wallace. *The Blacker the Berry*. 1929. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. Print.
- The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA*. Electronic Ed. Wed. *Documenting the American South*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 10 Dec. 2012.  
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/turner/turner.html>
- Toll, Robert C. *Blackening Up: the Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. Print.
- Tompkins, Jane P. "Uncle Tom's Cabin and Literary History." *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 1994. Print.
- Turner, James. Introduction. *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the Untied States of*

- America*. by David Walker. 1830. Baltimore: Black Class P, 1993. Print.
- Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture*. New York: Anchor, 1994. Print.
- Twagilimana, Aimable. *Race and Gender in the Making of an African American Literary Tradition*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997. Print.
- United Negro College Fund. Ad Council. Web. 26 Nov. 2012.
- <http://www.adcouncil.org/Our-Work/The-Classics/United-Negro-College-Fund>
- Uzgalis, William. "John Locke." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall) 2012. Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL =
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/locke/>. 01 Oct 2012.
- Walker, Alice. *Living by the Word: Essays*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988. Print.
- Walker, David. *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*. 1830. Baltimore: Black Classic P, 1993. Print.
- Walker, Margaret. *Jubilee*. New York: Houghton, 1966. Print.
- Waller, Fats. *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Victor, 1929.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSNPpssruFY>
- Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery*. 1901. New York: Signet, 2000. Print.
- Watkins, Mel. *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying – the Underground*

- of African-American Humor that Transformed American Culture, from Slavery to Richard Pryor*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994. Print.
- Webb, Frank J. "The Mixed School Question." *Frank J. Webb: Fiction, Essay, Poetry*. Ed. Werner Sollors. New Milford Ct.: Toby P, 2004. Print.
- Weld, Theodore Dwight. *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*. 1839. New York: Arno P, 1968. Print.
- West, Elizabeth J. *African Spirituality in Black Women's Fiction: Threaded Visions of Memory, Community, Nature, and Being*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011. Print.
- Wilson, Forrest. *Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1941. Print.
- Yarborough, Richard. "Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel." *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Print.
- Yellin, Jean Fagan. *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863*. New York: New York UP, 1972.
- Yetman, Norman R. *Life Under the Peculiar Institution: Selections from the Slave Narrative Collection*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Inc., 1970. Print.

## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF FIGURES



Eliza comes to tell Uncle Tom that he is sold and that she is running away to save her child. Page 62.

Figure. 1. “Eliza comes to tell Uncle Tom that he is sold and that she is running away to save her child.” Illustration by Hammatt Billings.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1852. Courtesy:

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/interframe.html>



Figure 2. "Valuing The Human Article." *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* 1853.

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



the very life is burning out of me. I'm a poor, miserable, forlorn drudge; I shall only drag you down with me, that's all. What's the use of our trying to do anything, trying to know anything, trying to be anything? What's the use of living? I wish I was dead!"

"Oh, now, dear George, that is really wicked! I know how you feel about losing your place in the factory, and you have a hard master; but pray be patient, and perhaps something—"

"Patient!" said he, interrupting her; "haven't I been patient? Did I say a word when he came and took me away, for no earthly reason, from the place where everybody was kind to me? I'd paid him truly every cent of my earnings; and they all say I worked well."



"Well, it *is* dreadful," said Eliza; "but, after all, he is your master, you know."

"My master! and who made him my master? That's what I think of—what right has he to me? I'm a man as much as he is; I am a better man than he is; I know more about business than he does; I'm a better manager than he is; I can read better than he can; I can write a better hand; and I've learned it all myself, and no thanks to him—I've learned it in spite of him; and now what

Figure 3. "George and Eliza."

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University





Figure 4. An Untitled Illustration of Chloe, Uncle Tom, Mose, Pete, Polly, and George Shelby

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

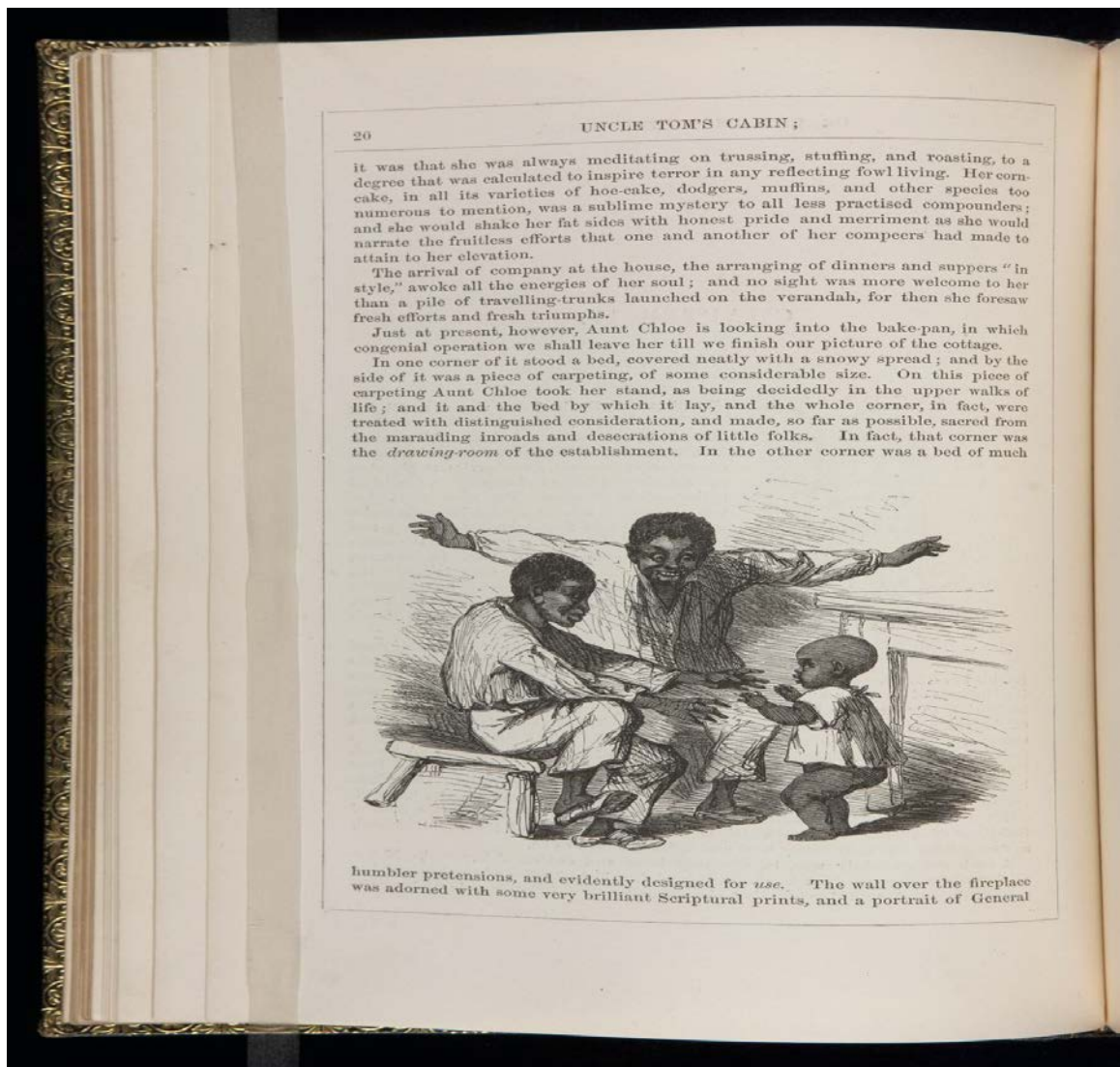


Figure 5. "Mose and Pete with the Baby."

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

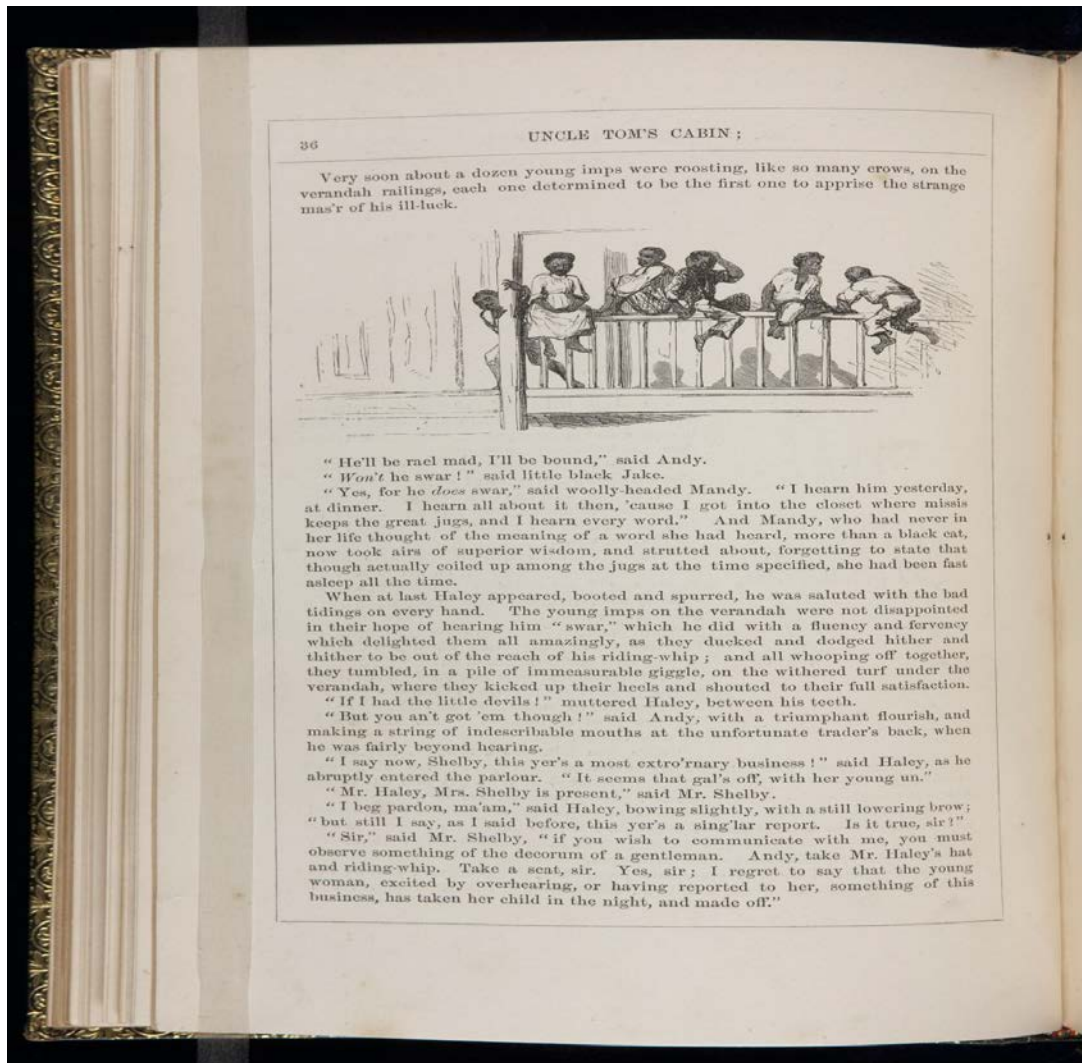


Figure 6. "Young Niggers on the Verandah"

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

"I did expect fair dealing in this matter, I confess," said Haley.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Shelby, turning sharply round upon him, "what am I to understand by that remark? If any man calls my honour in question, I have but one answer for him."

The trader cowered at this, and in a somewhat lower tone said that "it was plaguy hard on a fellow, that had made a fair bargain, to be galled that way."

"Mr. Haley," said Mr. Shelby, "if I did not think you had some cause for disappointment, I should not have borne from you the rude and unceremonious style of your entrance into my parlour this morning. I say thus much, however, since appearances call for it, that I shall allow of no insinuations cast upon me, as if I were at all partner to any unfairness in this matter. Moreover, I shall feel bound to give you every assistance, in the use of horses, servants, &c., in the recovery of your property. So, in short, Haley," said he, suddenly dropping from the tone of dignified coolness to his ordinary one of easy frankness, "the best way for you is to keep good-natured, and eat some breakfast; and we will then see what is to be done."

Mrs. Shelby now rose, and said her engagements would prevent her being at the breakfast-table that morning; and, deputing a very respectable mulatto woman to attend to the gentlemen's coffee at the sideboard, she left the room.



Figure 7. "Haley and Nigger Boys"

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



herself about something else, Topsy would hold a perfect carnival of confusion for some one or two hours. Instead of making the bed, she would amuse herself with pulling off the pillow-cases, butting her woolly head among the pillows, till it would sometimes be grotesquely ornamented with feathers sticking out in various directions; she would climb the posts, and hang head downwards from the tops; flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment; dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia's night-clothes, and enact various scenic performances with that—singing and whistling, and making grimaces at herself in the looking-glass; in short, as Miss Ophelia phrased it, "raising Cain" generally.

On one occasion Miss Ophelia found Topsy with her very best scarlet India Canton crape shawl wound round her head for a turban, going on with her rehearsals before the glass in great style—Miss Ophelia, having, with carelessness most unheard of in her, left the key for once in her drawer.

"Topsy!" she would say, when at the end of all patience, "what does make you act so?"

"Dun no, missis—I 'spects 'cause I's so wicked!"

"I don't know anything what I shall do with you, Topsy."

"Law, missis, you must whip me; my old missis allers whipped me. I an't used to workin' unless I gets whipped."

"Why, Topsy, I don't want to whip you. You can do well, if you've a mind to; what is the reason you won't?"

"Laws, missis, I's used to whippin'; I 'spects it's good for me."

Miss Ophelia tried the recipe, and Topsy invariably made a terrible commotion, screaming, groaning, and imploring; though half-an-hour afterwards,



Figure 8. "Topsy's Mischief."

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

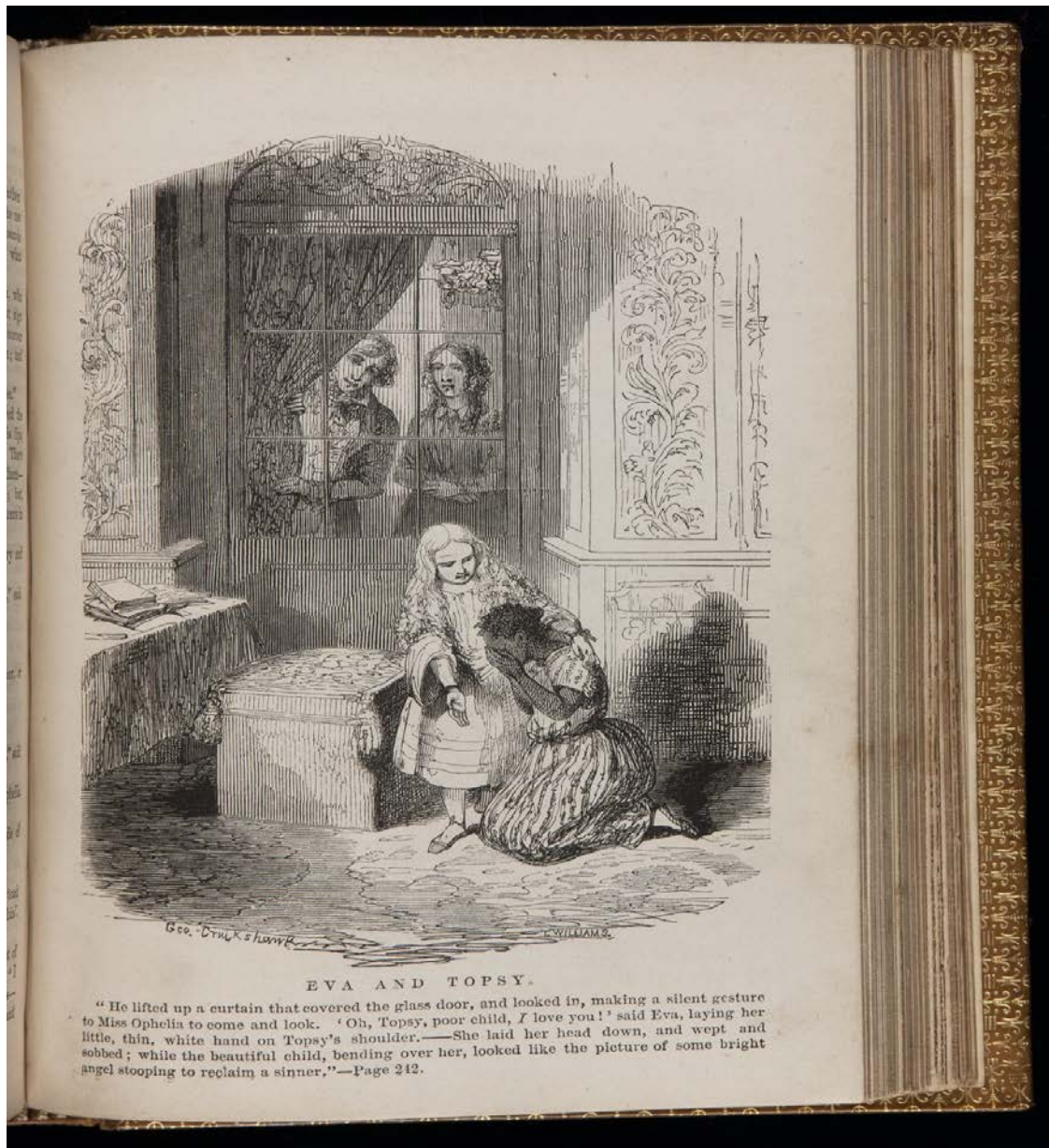


Figure. 9. "Eva and Topsy."

Artist: George Cruikshank

Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



A. W. AUNER, SONG PUBLISHER & PRINTER,  
Tenth and Race Sts., Philadelphia, Pa.

# COON DAT CARRIED DE RAZOR

Went to a ball de oder night,  
At Snsie Simkin's hut;  
Whar de coons all carry razors,  
And how dem niggers cut,  
Horace Jinks got in a row  
With slow-foot Jim Frazier;  
"Take care," squealed out old Sallie Gum,  
"Dat coon has got a razor."

CHORUS.

De coons did fly, de gals did cry,  
For poor old Johnny Frazier;  
Dey nearly cut dat coon to death,  
Dat coon dat had de razor.

Dey cut poor Johnny's coat-tail off,  
Dey carved him to de fat;  
Dey chopped his ear clean off his head,  
Den cut his beaver hat.  
Aunt Hannah said: "For gracious sake,  
You'll kill poor Johnny Frazier,"  
But he never noticed her at all,  
But slashed 'round wid dat razor.  
De coons did, &c.

Coons come flying down the stairs,  
Gals all hollered murder;  
Johnny Frazier he fell down,  
He couldn't fall no further.  
Horace he rushed for de mokes,  
And old policeman Hazier  
Said: I aint gwine to take dat coon,  
For he has got a razor."  
De coons did, &c.

A. W. AUNER'S  
CARD AND JOB PRINTING ROOMS,  
Tenth and Race Sts., Philadelphia, Pa.

Figure 10. "Coon Dat Carried De Razor."

Courtesy of Duke University Digital Collections

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/sizes/songsheets\\_bsvg200731/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/sizes/songsheets_bsvg200731/)



Figure 11. "Daniel Lambert"

Courtesy: [http://www.vintageviews.org/vv3/cemeteries/pages/cem04\\_005.html](http://www.vintageviews.org/vv3/cemeteries/pages/cem04_005.html)





Figure 12. "Miss Dinah Crow"